

GERALD ESTCOURT

HIS CONFESSIONS.

BY FLORENCE MARRYATT.

(MRS. ROSS CHURCHILL.)



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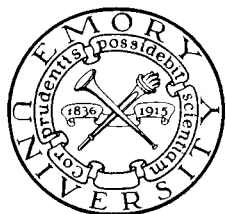
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GERALD ESTCOURT:

HIS CONFESSIONS.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYATT.

[MRS ROSS CHURCH.]

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN," "FOR EVER AND EVER,"
ETC. ETC.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us."

—SHAKESPEARE.



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GERALD ESTCOURT.



CHAPTER I.

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF LADY MARY ESTCOURT.

“GRASSLANDS, DORSET, 1836.

“*June 20th.*—I HAVE been miserable to-day. It was such a lovely morning that Parton intended running up to town, and I had anticipated a long holiday with the dear children, and had even planned a little pic-nic to take place in the wood ; but I am glad to say that I kept my design to myself, for Mrs Estcourt drove over from Wiversdale with her daughter Susan directly after breakfast, with the evident intention of staying to luncheon, and all our arrangements were, of course, upset. Parton dawdled about until he lost the eleven o'clock express ; and even had he gone, I suppose I should have been obliged to stay in and talk to the old lady. She asked for the children : the girls, as usual, openly showed their aversion to her, (it is not my fault if they *will not* take to their grandmother,) and poor Lascelles was shy and fractious, as he always is with any of the Wiversdale people. I tried to excuse his behaviour on the score of the hot weather, which seems to have tried him very much ; but Mrs Estcourt laughed in the most uncivil manner at the bare idea. She has no sympathy with anything like weakness or delicacy, and imagines that every one must enjoy the same rude health as herself.

“‘You make a fool of the child,’ she said, in her rough, coarse manner ; ‘you’ve nearly coddled him to death as it is.

Sampson,' she continued, (why will she persist in calling my husband by his first name, when she knows how much he dislikes it?) 'when are you going to send this boy to school : it's high time, and he would be twice as well there as he is here.' Parton was rather ruffled with her at the moment, because she had just told him, when he asked her if she had seen his new book, that she never read such rubbish as novels, so he made no answer to her remark ; but I am sure that he heard it, and I tremble lest he should act upon her advice. It is strange what an influence this old woman has over him, notwithstanding that they are always quarrelling with each other. I am sure she is at the bottom of his disagreements with myself, though he is hard enough to bear with, Heaven knows !—and I dread her entering the house, for she never does so without leaving some unpleasantness behind, in token of her visit. I mistrust my sisters-in-law also ; I cannot open my mouth to speak but I feel their sly eyes are on me, ready to pounce upon and if possible misconstrue the meaning of every word I utter.

"I have not been well lately. The morning tour of duty fatigued me, and in the middle of luncheon I fainted. The first words I heard on reviving were, 'It's my belief, Lady Mary brings half of this on herself, Sampson. She coddles herself just as she does that puny boy of yours, and with a little judgment it might be prevented. When did you ever see *me* faint?'

"Parton *had* the grace to tell his mother to hold her tongue, and I was naturally so indignant at what she had said, that I was glad of an excuse to leave the luncheon-room, and go to lie down upon my bed.

"Bring it on myself, indeed ! I suppose she imagines that the Portsdowne blood is like her own ! But she might make a little allowance for my not having been reared in the country amongst milkmaids and ploughboys. I was in hopes they would have left Grasslands without disturbing me further ; but in another half-hour they all came trooping up to say 'good-bye,' Parton, it seemed, being about to accompany his mother and sister back to Wiversdale to dinner. He generally manages to leave the house when I need him most. As they were quitting the room, Susan Estcourt stopped to examine my favourite little model of the Corinth at Rome, which

stood on the mantelpiece. She said she had never seen one so pretty before, evidently with a view to possessing it, for she knows her brother's disposition well.

" 'Pray take it,' said Parton, 'it's of no use to us : you're very welcome to it.'

"My poor little model that he bought me himself on the occasion of our visiting Italy on our wedding tour ; not that I value it for that reason, but I cannot bear that he should give away my things to Susan Estcourt. I sprang from the bed, saying quickly, 'Parton, that model is mine ;' but he would not allow me to finish my sentence. 'Pooh, pooh,' he interrupted me with, 'I can get you another in London any day, and Susan fancies it.' And then Mrs Estcourt remarked that 'of course, if Susan fancied it, that would be an additional reason for Lady Mary to set store by it.' I was so angry that I had no words to answer her with ; but I gave her a look which I think she will remember.

"How cruel these people are to me ! How unjust, and how bitter ! By what act have I ever incurred their resentment, except, indeed, by my marriage with Parton ; and what right have these *parvenus* to cavil at that ? I know the reason : they are jealous of me, and have been so ever since the day I had the misfortune to enter the family : jealous of my birth and my connexions, so far above their own, and in their presence my husband forgets the means by which he has raised himself, and becomes jealous of them too. He shot an angry glance at me as his mother spoke ; and taking my model off the mantelpiece, placed it in his sister's hands. Then Mrs Estcourt smiled one of those triumphant, self-satisfied smiles which she always displays when she has come between my husband and myself, and the next minute they were gone. But they left me in one of my most despondent moods, and my health is so weak at the present moment that I seem to have no energy to shake them off."

"*June 24th.*—What I dreaded has come to pass ! Parton told me this morning at breakfast that he intends sending Lascelles to school. He said that he had been thinking of it for some time ; but I am sure that his mother has been speaking to him upon the subject. She knows how I am wrapt up in that boy,—how much dearer, on account of his extreme delicacy and affection for myself, he is to me than my other

children,—and she will glory in the idea of what I shall feel in parting with him. I did all I could to make Parton see the matter in the same light that I do. I represented to him that Lascelles' fragile constitution demands more care than can be accorded him in a school ; that he is very unfit to associate with other boys ; and that I thought, with our ample means, we ought to have a tutor for him, at least for some years to come. But I found him bent upon having his own way : obstinacy is one of the worst traits in Parton's character. He began to talk so loud and so fast that he silenced me. He was not going to have his only son, he said, turned into a milksop, and brought up at his mother's apron-string ; he and his brothers had all been to public schools before Lascelles' age, and were none the worse for it, and the boy must fight his way through the world as his father had done before him.

"I could have reminded him that all the Estcourts were hardy boys and girls, and that my poor child had been reared to his present age with the greatest difficulty ; but he would only have met me with the usual retort, that I had physicked him to the state he is in ; so I changed the subject by asking if he had yet considered where he should place Lascelles. His answer was that he didn't know and he didn't care, his mother had promised to settle all that part of the business for him, and to find some school where the lad might be well looked after, and yet made a man of ; and all I had to do was to see that his clothes were got ready for an immediate start.

"'But not yet, Parton,' I said ; 'this is but the 24th of June, and no schools will reopen for a month to come.'

"'I know that,' he replied, 'but my mother wishes to have the boy at Wiversdale for a few weeks first ; and as her favour may be of some importance to him in after life, I think it just as well to humour her in the desire.'

"I could control myself no longer ; I burst out crying, and Parton laughed at my distress, until I completely lost my temper. I reproached him with cruelty to me and my children ; with being himself at the mercy of every caprice of his mother ; and wound up with a sarcasm relative to the probability of an *Estcourt* being capable of judging what kind of education was fit for a *Lascelles*. It was the worst card I could have played, and sealed my fate ; for I know of old that nothing makes Parton so angry as any illusion to the

difference of our birth. He behaved in the most ungentlemanlike manner; bade me remember, with an oath, that his children were *Estcourts* and not *Lascelles'*, and then proceeded to speak of the private character of my deceased father, and my brother Portsdowne, in a way that forced me to leave the breakfast-table, and I am afraid that nothing I could say now would shake his purpose. But my poor child! My poor Lascelles! I cannot get over the idea of parting with him. He is so young, only ten years old last birthday, and so tender that hitherto I have even been afraid of his visiting his grandparents at Wiversdale for fear he should be returned upon my hands ill; and now he is to be suddenly thrown into a whole school of healthy, hardy children, to shift for himself as he best may. When I think of it, I feel as if my heart would break!"

"*July 1st.*—This afternoon, Mr and Mrs Estcourt drove over in their grand carriage, with its bay horses, and all its vulgar assumption of wealth, and took away my precious child. I had lain awake the whole of last night, thinking of the moment of parting, and wondering how I should ever get through it; but when the time really came I was too proud to show how much I felt. Dear Lascelles clung to me to the very last, and averred openly that he would not go to Wiversdale; but my mother-in-law's countenance was wearing its most self-satisfied air, and I would have died rather than let her see me shed a tear. She attempted to explain something to me respecting the school at which the child is to be placed, and the arrangements she had made for him, but I stopped her peremptorily. 'Your son has confided all such things to your judgment, Mrs Estcourt,' said I, 'and I wish to hear nothing about them. What is necessary for me to know, Parton can tell me.' She shrugged her shoulders at my words, but only said in reply, that if such was the case, she supposed there was nothing further to detain them, and therefore they would go. Even then she could not leave me without a parting sneer; for as I helped my boy into the carriage she said—

"'Place Lascelles, or whatever's his name, next to me. I cannot imagine why that child was not called Sampson, after his father.'

"If she has made this remark once, since his birth, she has made it a hundred times. I could not resist saying, 'Lascelles

is the family name of the Portdownes, madam, and therefore I should imagine it is good enough to be borne by your grandson.' And then I hurried into the house again.

"Yet my heart was very full; and when I had seen the last of my child's pale face, pressed against the carriage window pane, I felt as though I had parted with him for ever. He cannot write with ease yet; and were he able to do so, what could such a young creature tell me of the treatment he receives? This act on the part of my husband has hardened me. The natural grief of my heart at parting with my boy seems overridden and crushed by the more powerful feelings of hatred and a longing for revenge, (all the stronger because I know them to be impotent,) which I cannot help entertaining towards him, and her who has been his aider and abettor in the scheme."

"*July 2d.*—Thinking of my little son, I passed a restless night, and my eyes this morning bore traces of the indulgence of my grief.

"I believe nothing makes Parton more angry than the sight of tears. He commenced to find fault with me directly he saw my face, and continued to do so until he had roused my temper, and we had a regular quarrel. Oh! when will these scenes cease! I feel sometimes as if I could bear them no longer.

"After breakfast, I strolled into the wood with my nurse and children, and sat upon a fallen tree whilst they ran about and picked wild flowers. What strong, healthy creatures my girls seem; the two eldest, Beatrice and Emmeline, are invariably taken for years older than they are; whilst the little ones are as ruddy and firm as peasants' children. I suppose it must be something in the blood they have inherited; but it is only my poor Lascelles whose constitution is at all like my own. The time is drawing very near when I shall again be a mother. I wish for another son; but if he is to give me the care and anxiety that Lascelles has done, I trust that my child may prove a daughter. Yet, six daughters! the prospect is almost too much for one woman to contemplate."

"*August 9th.*—This day, a month ago, my baby was born;—a second son after all, but a very different specimen from the first. He is a splendid child, and I feel very proud of

him ; large and fat and strong, with dark eyes, and a head of dark curly hair. The nurse says, the finest baby she has ever seen. Parton was not with me at the time, as he had gone to Norway for a fortnight's fishing some days previously, but he seemed very much pleased when he returned home. Unfortunately, Mrs Estcourt took it into her head to nurse me during his absence, which greatly interfered with my comfort ; and I fancy she must have perceived that I would rather be left by myself, for she did not prolong her stay beyond the third day. She had a battle-royal with her son, relative to the naming of the child, which amused me greatly. Parton has a predilection for pretty and aristocratic names ; and as all the Estcourts bear particularly plain ones, he has refused to call any of his children after his family. His own name is 'Sampson Parton Estcourt ;' but, since he has become well known in the literary world, he has dropped the Sampson altogether, to the great indignation of his relations, who choose to think the act denotes that he has grown too proud to permit them to use the more familiar appellation, which, however, they steadfastly refuse to drop. Mrs Estcourt wished this baby to be called 'Jabez,' after old Mr Estcourt. Imagine my beautiful dark-eyed boy going through life with the name of 'Jabez !'

" But for once, I am thankful to say, Parton's wishes do not positively clash with mine. He holds out stoutly against having anything to do with his father's name. 'You will call him by another of the absurdly finikin names of the *Portdownes* I suppose,' said his mother spitefully. 'I shall do no such thing,' he replied. 'I shall call him after my last hero, Gerald Trevor ; will that please you ?'

" Mrs Estcourt almost screamed ; she said it was a heathen name from a heathen book, and the clergymen who would baptize a Christian child after the hero of a novel ought to be stripped of his gown.

" The mother and son fought hard for upwards of an hour, but the contest ended, as it always does end, by Parton swearing frightfully, and declaring that he would have his own way, whatever other people thought or said. And so my little beauty is to be called 'Gerald Estcourt ;' rather a romantic name certainly, and if I had had my choice, I would rather have called him 'Francis,' after my own father ; but

I am so used to encounter opposition whenever I advance an opinion, that I said nothing on the subject, and anything is better than 'Jabez,' or knowing that Mrs Estcourt has had her way in the matter. Finding that my husband was on indifferent terms with his mother, I ventured to put in a hint about Lascelles returning home; but on this point he is unnaturally obdurate. If he can be firm with her he can be cruel with me. I have heard often of my absent child; he is at a school at Kensington, but London never agreed with him, and my heart is very sad about him at times."

* * * *

"*September 4th.*—Parton's new book, 'Gerald Trevor,' is making a great sensation in literary circles, and has been pronounced to be the cleverest hit of the season. I am surprised at his success, as I never much admired his writing myself; but I trust that the fact of my little Gerald bearing the lucky hero's name may be an omen of good to him. But with each rise that Parton makes in the world the jealousy of his family increases, and appears to me invariably to vent itself upon my head, as if I was the cause of their offence. I have been in hot water at Wiversdale for the last month. Parton insisted upon my paying a visit there as soon as I was well enough to do so; and on one occasion I discovered that Susan Estcourt had been tampering with a letter of her brother's before she delivered it into my hands. I accused her of the fact before the assembled family, and appealed to Parton in writing for justification of my anger; but, as usual, he took his sister's part. He takes everybody's part but mine. He supposed Susan thought his letters were for her as much as for myself, and requested me not to make a noise about nothing. But I did make a noise about it, and I believe I said something to the effect that I ought to have known before I married what kind of treatment I might expect from my husband's family. I am not very clear as to what I *do* say when I am in a passion. I know the affair ended by Parton arriving in a hurry, and taking me back to Grasslands, where he made my life miserable by his reproaches; and I have seen none of the Estcourts since. I am thankful for it. When will there be a stoppage to all this? I suppose it must end some day."

* * * *

"*November 30th.*—I have been grossly insulted ; there is a point where human nature must turn, and I will bear this kind of thing no longer. My nurse came to me this morning, and asked me in a mysterious manner if I had heard that Master Lascelles was at Wiversdale.

" 'Nonsense, nurse,' I exclaimed, 'you must be mistaken ; Master Lascelles is at school at Kensington.'

" 'Not now, ma'am,' the woman replied ; 'he was sent to his grandmamma's ill, more than a week ago, and they tell me he is very bad.' She refused to give me the name of her informant, as she said it would be as much as her place was worth with 'the master' if it transpired that she had been the means of conveying the news to me. These servants all know on what terms Parton and I live together, and that my influence in the household is nothing compared to that of Mrs Estcourt. As nurse concluded her statement, I was trembling with excitement and indignation, and hastily throwing on my bonnet and shawl, I told her to order the carriage to come round at once.

" 'That's just what I hoped to see you do, ma'am,' she said on receiving the order ; 'tell what lies they may, they can't deny as you've the best right to nurse your own child.'

"The 'best right!' yes, indeed, and the sole right, and I was determined to claim it. How *dared* they not only remove my child from school without my knowledge, but keep him at Wiversdale sick ; and not even have the grace to let his mother know of his illness ? My heart throbbed so violently as I drove along, that I could hear its pulsation ; and my impatience was so great that I thought the ten miles which divided me from Lascelles would never be accomplished. But they were traversed at last ; and as the door of Wiversdale Manor was opened to my summons, I rushed panting through the hall, and into the library, which is the general sitting-room. Mrs Estcourt was there with her husband and her two unmarried daughters, Sarah and Susan.

" 'Where is my child ?' I exclaimed, without any preface ; 'where is Lascelles ? I have come to fetch him home : how *dared* you keep from me the knowledge of his illness ?' I suppose I looked like a tigress robbed of her whelps ; I know I felt like one. My husband's mother rose slowly and confronted me.

“ ‘What do you mean, Lady Mary, by this extraordinary ebullition ?’ she demanded.

“ ‘Mean, madam ! I mean that Lascelles is in this house, and that I will have him,’ I answered angrily.

“ ‘That you certainly shall not,’ she said ; ‘Lascelles is here by his father’s wish, and no one shall remove him without his father’s sanction ; added to which, he is not in a fit state to leave the house.’

“ ‘Is he so *very* ill ?’ I demanded in a broken voice.

“ ‘Seriously so,’ was the measured reply.

“ ‘Let me go to him,’ I said wildly, attempting to leave the room, but Mrs Estcourt placed herself between me and the door.

“ ‘I can permit nothing of the kind,’ she answered.

“ ‘Do you intend to keep me from him ?’ I passionately exclaimed.

“ ‘Most certainly,’ was the reply ; ‘the child is suffering under an attack of scarlet fever, which is aggravated by inflammatory symptoms on the chest ; and putting aside the danger of infection to yourself, any agitation might be attended with serious consequences to him. Be reasonable, Lady Mary ; the boy was sent here to save anxiety to yourself and risk to your other children, and it would be folly in you to insist upon undoing our precaution for the mere gratification of looking at Lascelles. All that can be done for him is being done, you may be assured of that.’

“ ‘But I felt, notwithstanding the apparent smoothness of her speech, that she was triumphing in her heart that she had got the upper hand of me.

“ ‘Mr Estcourt,’ said I, turning to my father-in-law, ‘will you permit me to be insulted in this manner in your own house ?’ but ‘I never interfere, my dear, I never interfere,’ was all the satisfaction I gained from appealing to him.

“ ‘I will go to Parton,’ I exclaimed, (my husband is in London at the present moment.) ‘I will tell him how you have treated me, Mrs Estcourt ; indifferent as he is, he will not permit me to receive insult at your hands.’

“ ‘Then the woman dared to turn upon me ; to tell me that my husband had married me for the sake of my rank alone, and that he had much better have been contented with a wife such as his brothers had chosen, for he had got a sorry bargain

for his pains ; that he was utterly indifferent to me ; and that nothing I could say would influence him if *she* chose to persuade him to act in a contrary direction. And all the time she spoke, Sarah and Susan were smiling in a furtive manner at one another across the library table, and the old man was shuffling about the room, evidently uneasy at what was going on, but afraid to put in a word that should further rouse the dominant spirit of his wife.

“As the bitter, mocking truths fell from her tongue, I could have struck her as she stood ; and although I had no power to deny her statements, I gave her back word for word. Part of what she said I had known before ; but to receive the account from the lips of one who should have died before she repeated such to me, was an indignity which I felt was not to be endured a second time. Trembling with passion, I left her presence, and, returning to Grasslands, hastily made such preparations as are necessary for a journey to London, whither I followed Parton the same night. I must have an explanation from him of this treatment, or place my case in the hands of some one more competent to judge for me than myself.”

“*December 1st.*—Parton has rooms in the Albany when he stays in town alone, therefore I could not see him till this morning. He was astonished at my sudden appearance, and not over-pleased ; but I soon opened my mind to him, and asked him if it was by his desire that I was refused admittance to the bedside of my son. At first he was rather disposed to shuffle about the matter, and said that Lascelles had been sent to Wiversdale in the first instance to avoid alarming me, and now that the complaint had proved to be infectious and dangerous, it was certainly not advisable that he should be moved ; and that as to his mother's treatment of myself, I should remember the circumstances under which I last left her house. But this did not satisfy me.

“‘I have come, Parton,’ I said, ‘to ask you a plain question. Am I to have my son under my own care as soon as he may be moved, or not ; and in the meanwhile is it your wish that I am to be prevented seeing the child, because, if so, I shall appeal to my own family against such treatment on the part of yours ?’ At this he flew into an awful rage ; called me a fool for wishing to see Lascelles under such circumstances, and to run the risk of carrying the infection into my nursery ;

cursed and swore at every member of my family ; and said that the boy being above seven years old no one but himself had legal right to control his actions. I told him how bitterly his mother had insulted me with regard to himself ; and his passion was so ungovernable that he was shameless enough, not only to confess the truth of her statements, but to say that any other man would have acted in the same way who had been cursed with such a wife.

" He affirmed that under present circumstances we should never live together in peace, and that the best thing we could do was to separate. I retorted that if Lascelles was to be given up thenceforth to the guardianship of his grandmother, I should be the first to desire such a plan. He replied that the child was his own, and he should do what he chose with him ; and that if I was not very careful I should never see his face again. I think I told him everything that was on my mind, and then I went to consult my brother, Lord Portsdowne."

" *December 2nd.*—Portsdowne is very anxious that I should come to a compromise with Parton, and called on him this morning with a view to that end. But my husband steadfastly refuses to remove his son from Wiversdale ; his senior brother is unmarried, and Lascelles being the eldest grandson, it is the evident intention of his father that he shall be brought up as the presumptive heir of Wiversdale, the estate being unentailed. He says that I am welcome to the guardianship of the younger children until such time as he may wish to have them to live with himself, and that if I consent to a private separation, he is willing to make me a suitable allowance for their maintenance and education. He told Portsdowne that he intends to let Grasslands, and settle in London. It appears to me that he has been planning this proposal for some time past. What shall I do ? My brother urges me to seek a reconciliation ; seems to imagine that I ought to rejoice at, rather than lament, the good fortune in store for Lascelles ; ascribes this rupture to my own temper, and prophesies that I shall regret taking steps for a separation before the arrangement has been a month in force. But I differ from him. The vision of living in peace with my little children is very tempting to me, and Mrs Estcourt will at least have the chagrin to know that I am beyond the shafts of her sarcasm. True, I shall not

see my darling Lascelles ; but what are the chances for my doing so did I remain ? And I will never apologise to my husband's mother ; which is one of the conditions he made of a reconciliation. On the whole it is a difficult question. I have written to inform Parton that I will take a week to decide it."

"*December 10th.*—I am at Grasslands again, for the last time. For a week I have been holding communion with my own heart, and I have made up my mind ; I will leave him.

"I have been passing in review all the events of my married life, and I find nothing to make me waver in my resolution. I am the mother of seven children : and, as far back as the date of my eldest daughter's birth, I can remember this house to have been the scene of constant wrangling, and often of serious quarrels. As the primary cause of all this, I reckon the influence and unwarrantable interference of Mrs Estcourt, added perhaps to an incompatibility of temper between Parton and myself, which was fatally apparent almost from our first acquaintance. He married me in order that my connexions, added to his own talent, might raise him in the social scale above his fellows ; and the consequence is, that jealousy of the society he mixes in, and the fame he has acquired, has established ill-feeling in the breasts of his less fortunate brothers and sisters, which, afraid on account of the firmness of his disposition, to show to himself, they have vented in the most cruel manner upon me.

"I have led a miserable life ever since I lowered myself by marrying him. I cannot amalgamate with these people nor take an interest in their pursuits ; and their knowledge of the fact has so set them against me, that their ill-natured tongues would have separated Parton and myself, had not our opposite dispositions done so.

"However, it is of little use thinking of this now. My mind as to my future course of action is fully made up. I will not live longer with a man who has so little sense of the respect due to my birth, if not to my position as his wife. I will not have my children grow up beneath the influence of his example, and that of his family, when it is in my power to prevent it. Though they have the misfortune to bear the name of Estcourt, I cannot forget that they are the grand-

children of the Earl of Portsdowne. I have written this day to Parton, and to my brother, to say that I accept the offer of a separate maintenance. I shall be poor, it is true, but I shall be at peace."

"*January 2d, 1837.*—This day I left Grasslands. Parton has not been home since I followed him to London, so all our arrangements have been made by letter.

"I am to receive from him an annual sum of three hundred pounds, which, with the interest of my marriage settlement, will secure me an income of seven hundred a year; little enough, compared with what I have been in the habit of enjoying, but ample for the quiet life which I hope to lead with my children. Portsdowne is very much annoyed, and disposed to be angry with me, for my decision; the cause, he maintains, not being sufficiently strong to warrant the effect, but he cannot know half the aggravation I have received.

"If any one could shake my resolution, my only brother would surely have the power to do so—for I am sisterless and an orphan, but I can be firm.

"The servants were very kind and respectful to me. I told them briefly that I was about to give up the charge of Grasslands, and I think they sympathised with me, and doubtless guessed the cause. The nurses are the only ones whom I have brought away. The woman who informed me that Lascelles was at Wiversdale, nearly upset my equanimity at the last moment, by mentioning his name. 'If Master Lascelles was only with us, ma'am,' she said, 'I shouldn't care for anything else.' How my heart echoed her words! The fact of leaving my precious boy behind was indeed the only thing which made me, once or twice, waver before coming to a final decision as to my own movements. How I longed to see him, if but for a moment, before I left Grasslands; but the idea of encountering Mrs Estcourt again was more than I could venture to contemplate. He is better, thank God! I know that for a certainty, for one of my servants who had business at the Manor saw and spoke to him whilst passing through one of the corridors. I have no fear that they will not be kind to him: my bitterest thought is of the triumph which his grandmother will experience at what she will consider my defeat. However, I must try not to think of it, although my hatred of her comes between my

prayers and heaven. He will never love her as he loves me, that is one comfort ; and I have six children left.

“ Yet, notwithstanding all the sternness of my resolutions, my mind would dwell on nothing else ; and as I heard the clang with which the drive-gates of Grasslands shut behind me, I felt that, sooner or later, God’s curse must descend on the heads of those who dare, by compulsion or otherwise, to separate a mother from the children she has brought into the world.”

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER AND SON.

I AM Gerald Estcourt. From the foregoing extracts from my mother’s Diary, it will be seen that the unhappy quarrels which separated my father and herself, for the remainder of their lifetime, commenced before my birth. Therefore I have no intention of animadverting here upon either their justice or their cause. *Qui legit, ipse judicet.* That faults existed upon both sides, there is little doubt ; and that the effect of such faults held no slight influence over the lives of their children may readily be imagined when I state, that I had nearly reached my eleventh year before I saw my father.

At that time I was living with my mother and three younger sisters at the quiet town of Guildford, in Surrey. The eldest, Beatrice, had just made a very distinguished marriage from her father’s house in London, where the second, Emmeline, was then residing with him.

My third sister, Gertrude, was a pretty girl of about eighteen, who was anxiously waiting for her time to arrive to go through a London season ; and the two youngest, Lillas and Marguerite, were still under the charge of a governess at home. I, for my part, was consigned for a portion of each day to the care of a neighbouring clergyman, and watched anxiously from my mother’s house as I went to and from my tutor’s, for fear I should speak to, or even look at, any of the little dirty boys I might meet upon the road. As my sisters

successively bloomed into womanhood, my mother was compelled with many tears to resign them during the season to the guardianship of their father, and to know that they took a share in gaieties of which she totally disapproved. I believe that she had always been remarkably strict upon this point even with regard to herself; but since her separation from her husband, her dislike of anything in the shape of pleasure almost amounted to intolerance. Hence our home was made so dull and uncongenial to us that we hailed the idea of anything like a change; and, notwithstanding the mysterious silence with which my mother always received any allusions to the doings of our unknown father, a visit to London was considered by us all much in the same light as a Mussulman thinks of Paradise; and I remember, young as I was, how I envied Beatrice and Emmeline (though I hardly knew for what) when those letters arrived which demanded their presence in town.

And yet I loved my mother, and had little pleasure in seeing her shed tears, and she returned my affection, although in a wayward, uncertain manner, as fondly as ever a woman did that of her child. But whether her knowledge of my father's temperament made her fear lest the same blood running in my veins might lead me into early excesses; or whether, foreseeing that the period would arrive when I should be removed from her influence, she hoped to inculcate sufficient morality to last a lifetime, I know not; but she was so exceedingly strict with me, that as soon as I had passed the age of infancy I commenced to droop and sicken of my life. I was allowed no playfellows but my sisters, Lillias and Marguerite: a stand-up fight with a boy who insulted me on my way to school entailed a lecture on me which might have befitted a youthful murderer: whilst a slang word, picked up furtively in the street, was sufficient to insure me imprisonment in the house for many days afterwards. Brought up in this bread-and-butter style, I could not thrive. I was a strong tall boy of my age, inheriting, I am glad to say, more of the red blood of the Estcourts than the blue blood of the Portsdownes, with sufficient energy in me for any amount of "larks;" and I used to look wistfully at the ragged urchins playing together in the roads, and long to join in their sports.

"Oh, I *wish* I was a blackguard," I sighed one day, to the

infinite horror of my mother, who gravely reminded me that on her side I came from the blood of earls, and the only manner in which I could prove my right to so noble a descent was by being more of a gentleman than other boys, instead of less. I am afraid my poor mother sadly doubted on that occasion whether the current of my life had not by some accident been all derived from the "*parvenu*" Estcourts; but however sensible it may have been, her argument failed to convince me that I was wrong, and I still wished that I had been born a "blackguard."

Even the clergyman who gave me my daily instruction pitied me. I was, of course, his only pupil, my mother having made it a particular stipulation that such should be the case. But my tutor had sons of his own, although they were at that time grown up and out in the world; and I can recall the compassionate smile with which he would pat my head when, having found me weary and disconsolate over my tasks, and recommended me to lay the books on one side and go and have a good game of play, I used to sigh and answer him that I had "nobody to play with."

Once, two of his grandsons were expected to spend the day with him, and inadvertently he told me to ask my mother to let me join the party. But the bright flush of pleasure which mounted to my face at this proposal was quickly dispelled, when, at a look from his wife, he recalled his invitation with the words, "Better not, perhaps, though, dear boy, better not; Lady Mary is so *very* particular."

I remember how I went home that day (it was a dull November afternoon) and employed an hour before tea-time stoning the cats in the back garden from my bedroom window, and longing feverishly that either I had been born a girl, or that my sisters were boys like myself. Yet I never thought of blaming my mother as the cause of my solitary existence; I must do her the justice to say that she never spoke against my father in my hearing; and yet the very reticence which she displayed when his name was introduced, served to imbue me with the idea that it was in consequence of some fault of his, and not of ours, that we lived without him.

I was extremely innocent: she had taken good care that I should be so, and the subjects of marriage and divorce and separation were sealed mysteries to me; yet I knew that other

children had fathers who lived in the same house, and loved them and were familiar with them ; and the first query which assailed my dawning intelligence was, "Why have not I a father who does the same?"

"Haven't I *ever* had a father, mother?" was one of the puzzles I offered for her solution in those baby days ; and although, of later years, my sisters had considerably enlightened me on this point, my father still remained a visionary personage to me, and I often mourned the fact in secret, and wondered if it would ever be my lot to know him.

Not that we never heard of or from him at Guildford. The separation between my mother and himself having taken place by mutual consent, he had not, once rid of her presence, cherished any violent antipathy to her.

Formal letters relative to their children, or money matters, passed between them at stated periods ; and whenever my father was in a particularly good humour, or had made an uncommonly lucky hit with his writing, he used to be perfectly lavish in his expenditure on presents for us all ; which presents my mother (being unable to distribute such handsome ones among us herself) was wont to regard with a very jealous and depreciative eye ; and we quickly became aware that the sooner we packed away the contents of the boxes which came from London out of her sight, the better she would be pleased.

After having been once convinced, however, by the delight of receiving such tangible proofs of his existence, that I really had a male progenitor, and asked in vain for satisfaction as to what he had done that I never saw him, the next question which naturally arose was, "What is he like?" And when Beatrice or Emmeline returned for a few days to visit their mother, I used to assail her privately for descriptions of his personal appearance, and was never tired of hearing how good-looking he was, how generous, and how clever. From such descriptions my fancy would build up an ideal of all that is most excellent in man, until I literally burned to escape from Guildford and the monotony of my daily life, and make the acquaintance of this unknown father in the unknown land he dwelt in.

Things were in this train when we received the news of my brother Lascelles' death. He had always been, I believe, of an excessively delicate constitution, and of late years had

shown symptoms of pulmonary disease. He was taken ill at Woolwich, where he was prosecuting his studies for the army, and died in a few days of inflammation of the lungs. The announcement therefore was very sudden and unexpected. To my mother it was a blow, which, to her dying day, she never forgot, for no amount of separation or length of time had sufficed to wean her from the devoted feeling which she had always entertained towards her eldest son, though how far that was nurtured by the intense jealousy which she experienced at my brother being brought up by Mrs Estcourt of Wiversdale, it is difficult to determine. I remember the gloom which enveloped our house for many months afterwards, and how the slightest allusion to our dead brother would call down such torrents of tears on her part as I had never seen her display before. For my own part I grieved little, for I had scarcely known Lascelles. He had once paid us a long visit when I was a child of four years old, but that had faded from my memory; and since he had commenced his education at a public school, we had never seen him for more than a few days at a time, on which occasions he always appeared ill at ease, and as if he felt himself to be a stranger amongst us. The fact is, that notwithstanding all my mother's doubts to the contrary, Lascelles had been reared with great tenderness at Wiversdale, and what heart he possessed he kept for his grandparents and his father. But at the best he was a sickly, indifferent sort of lad; handsome with the beauty of a girl, but possessing little vitality or energy of purpose, and rather looked down upon by myself, even in the chrysalis state from which I viewed him. Consequently, except that it caused my mother's tears to flow, my brother's death concerned me little, for I was too young to feel the advantages which would accrue to me on account of it.

I have exonerated Lady Mary from ever attempting to prejudice me against my father, but I cannot say as much for her conduct respecting my grandmother, Mrs Estcourt; for no "bogy" was ever held up as a greater object of terror to the minds of children than was the idea of the old lady at Wiversdale Manor held up to us. My mother could not restrain her anger against her. The story of how she had stolen my eldest brother was repeated until we learned to shrink together with fear, lest we also should be wrested from her arms; and the

worst threat she could use to deter us from disobeying her commands was, that if we were not dutiful children, she should send us to Wiversdale. Smarting under the knowledge of how Lascelles' affection had been lured from her, she tried to implant as strong a dislike of her husband's relations in the breasts of her remaining children as possible, lest they also should be won to love anybody better than herself, a proceeding more politic in theory than in practice, for the affections will be their own judges. With regard to me, however, she need have been under no apprehension of Mrs Estcourt entertaining too strong a predilection, for the time was fast approaching when the amiable disposition which my grandmother was pleased to display towards me was to have an opportunity of recommending itself to my notice.

At the period of which I now write, my mother's censures on the former doings and sayings of the family at Wiversdale had gained additional force from the fact that my father had once more taken up his residence at Grasslands, which had brought my elder sisters in contact with his relations. For some time after the dissolution of his household, he had let his country seat, and taken up his abode entirely in town; but latterly he had been returned as member for the county of Dorset, and had, in consequence, reopened Grasslands with great festivities, accounts of which, from the lips of her daughters, doubtless rankled in the mind of my mother. She had given up all this luxury of her own free will, but she could not bring herself to forgive those who, she believed, had forced her to make such a decision, and whom her fancy pictured as triumphing in the fact that it was hers no longer.

One morning, about a year after we had received the announcement of Lascelles' death, I was preparing, as usual, to leave home for my tutor's house, when I heard sundry sounds of grief proceeding from the drawing-room. It was so common a thing now for me to see my mother cry, that I was proceeding on my way without giving it another thought, when my sister Gertrude came to me in the hall.

"Wait a minute, Gerald; mamma wants to speak to you before you go."

"What's the row?" I demanded, rather irreverently.

"Only a letter from papa: I wish I were *you*," she answered, mysteriously.

"Gertrude, tell Gerald to come in here," said the broken voice of my mother, through the half-closed door.

I threw down my satchel of books, and obeyed her request, for my curiosity was roused. I found her standing by the mantelpiece, bathed in tears; and as I advanced to her side she placed her two hands on my shoulders, and looked me steadfastly in the face.

"Gerald!" she exclaimed, "do you want to leave me? will you desert your more than widowed mother, to be taught indifference towards her, as my poor Lascelles was?"

I did not guess what she was hinting at, and so I looked awkward, as boys will under such circumstances, and asked what I had done that she should put such questions to me.

"Your father has written to me to send you to Grasslands," she continued, with a fresh burst of tears as she crushed a letter which she held in her hand; "and he will take you to Wiversdale, and I shall never see you again."

"To Grasslands, mother!" I exclaimed, flushing to the roots of my hair with excitement, "how jolly!" but, then noting the bitter look of disappointment which stole over her face at my thoughtless words, I added, penitently, "it won't be for long, you know, mother; I shall soon come back."

"I don't know that," she replied, rather coldly; "however, I dare say it will not make much difference to you, Gerald, whether you do or not. Years of love and care have doubtless no weight in your mind, when placed in the balance against a few idle pleasures which I have not the means to afford you."

She was unjust to me then. I was an affectionate boy, and not likely to forget her; but my life at Guildford had been so devoid of all boyish pleasures that she might have forgiven me a transitory outburst of pleased surprise at the prospect of seeing a little of the world. Her words chilled me, and I hung my head, dispirited.

"It isn't that, mother," I said, sadly; "you know I shall always love you, but I've never seen my father, like Beatrice and Emmeline. I won't go if you don't wish it, mother."

"I *do* wish it, Gerald," she replied, more kindly, (she did not think it necessary to tell me that she had no choice in the matter;) and I shall send you, as your father directs, next week. But remember this, my boy. If you go to Wiversdale

Manor, and learn to love your grandmother and your aunts and uncles there, I shall never love you again. They have been my worst enemies, and those who care for them cannot care for me. Whenever you look at your grandmother, remember that she nearly broke your mother's heart, and that your aunts and uncles stood by, and laughed at it. If you do not, I shall never more call you a son of mine."

Her face was so earnest as she gave vent to this speech that it sounded like an impending curse upon my head, and deeply impressed me.

"I won't, mother; indeed I won't!" I exclaimed fervently, clinging to her in a very child-like fashion; "and I will come back to you very soon; I will indeed, and never go away again."

She heaved a deep sigh, and gently unclasping my arms from about her neck, kissed and dismissed me to my studies. She knew how more than likely it was that, once broken loose from the home-nest, I should never be quite her own again.

There was not much preparation needed to render me fit for the anticipated visit, for my mother always dressed me like the son of a gentleman; and a few days after the conversation related above, I found myself, under the charge of a trustworthy servant, on my way to join my father at Grasslands.

CHAPTER III.

GRASSLANDS—FATHER AND SON.

UNTIL I left Guildford I did not dare give vent to my joy at the prospect before me, which was, however, extreme; but when I had once lost sight of my mother's grave face, and the sound of her despondent words, my happiness was boundless. The servant who accompanied me had orders to take me only as far as London, and see me safely into the Dorsetshire train, therefore the last half of my journey was performed alone. My excitement was so great that I remember nothing that

occurred upon the way, excepting that I greatly astonished some ladies in the same railway carriage by the gratuitous information that I was travelling down to see my father for the first time in my life; and the answers I gave to subsequent questions which they put to me must have considerably enlightened them as to portions of my family history. Although I had been brought up in such a secluded manner, I was not at all a shy boy; and on my arrival at the station at which it had been impressed upon me that I must get out, I jumped upon the platform and looked round in the most independent manner to ascertain who had been sent to meet me.

I expected to see some man or perhaps woman servant advance to ask me my name; but I was scarcely prepared for the appearance of a flunkey, dressed in an extravagant livery of drab and gold colour, who, saying confidently "Mr Gerald Estcourt? this way, sir," led me through the unpretending little station-room to the road beyond, where was standing a carriage, and pair of bay horses. The door being thrown open, I sprung in, and found myself in the arms of my sister Emmeline.

"My darling boy," she exclaimed, (I was always terribly spoilt by my sisters,) "I am so delighted to see you here! Home, John," and in another minute we were rolling onwards towards Grasslands. It was all like a dream to me, a wonderful dream of happiness and magnificence; and I suppose my feelings were depicted on my countenance, for my sister laughed at my surprise, as she sat with her arm encircling my waist.

"You mustn't look so astonished, Gerald," she said presently; "this is nothing to what you will see at Grasslands. You can have no idea of the style in which papa lives. He has been so anxious about your arrival; I am sure he was quite nervous to-day at the idea of meeting you, for he would not come to the station with me. He expects great things of you, Gerald. I hope he may not be disappointed."

"Great things of *me*, Emmy," I said; "but why?"

"You are his only son now, Gerald, remember. Since poor Lascelles is gone, he has no one to look to but yourself to carry on the family name."

This was the first notion which had been given me that individually I was of importance to my father; and the idea of

carrying on the family name made me hold my boyish head an inch higher, even as I sat by my sister's side.

"Do you think my father cares for me, Emmy?" I asked, after a pause.

"I am sure he does, Gerald," she replied.

Here was another new idea. Hitherto all my thoughts concerning my father had been concentrated upon his ability to give me handsome presents, and the pride I should feel in seeing how others admired his person and his genius. I had never before dreamt of him as loving me; but my sister's words made my heart warm towards him at once.

"I hope that you will love him also, dear," she continued.

"I *do*, Emmy; I love him now," I replied, with eagerness.

Then she went on to tell me of the visitors who were staying at Grasslands, amongst the foremost of whom was my newly-married sister, Beatrice, with her husband, Lord Henry Claremont. From Emmeline's description it appeared to my inexperienced mind as if the house must be quite full, and I anxiously demanded whether there were any boys amongst the guests.

"No boys young enough to suit your taste, I am afraid, Gerald," she replied, laughing; "but don't be alarmed, we will get you some play-fellows by and by, and in the meanwhile papa will let you do exactly as you like. He is as kind and indulgent as he can be. He has bought the most beautiful little pony for you to ride, and I dare say you will be out with him half the day."

The prospect of the pony completely subdued me, and I am afraid that until we reached Grasslands it occupied my thoughts even to the exclusion of the meeting with my father. However, the opening of the drive-gates recalled me to myself; and so agitated did I become that I doubt if I noticed any part of the beautiful grounds which formed the approach to the hall. As soon as the carriage steps were let down, I eagerly followed my sister into the house, when, seizing my hand, she drew me after her into a small octagonal room, which was my father's study.

Standing with his back to the mantelpiece, and his hands under his coat tails, (although it was summer weather, and no fire was in the grate,) was a fine upright man of about five-and-fifty years of age, with gray hair and florid complexion, whose

dark eye seemed so familiar to me that I felt at once it must have been from him that I derived my own.

"Here is Gerald, papa!" exclaimed Emmeline, as she led me forward. I fancied there was a nervously expectant tone in her voice, as if she was not quite certain what my father would think of me; but if it was the case, her fears must have been soon set at rest, for he took his hands quickly from beneath his coat tails, and, starting forward, seized me by the shoulders and drew me to the light.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, with a look of pleasant surprise, "is this he? I had no idea he would be so tall,—why, he is an Estcourt all over." And then, suddenly releasing me, he held out both his hands, and shook mine warmly. "And how are you, my fine fellow?" he demanded, looking me affectionately in the face.

"Quite well, father," I answered, with my eyes fixed scrutinisingly upon his own features.

"He has a look of poor Lascelles, Emmeline!" he said presently, when he had done surveying me.

"Do you think so, papa?" she replied, dubiously.

"Well, perhaps not, my dear; I may be mistaken; but I thought the features were somewhat similar. Take the youngster away with you, and let him have something to eat after his journey."

I was unwilling that the interview should end so quickly; and as my sister prepared to obey the injunction she had received, I pushed her from me.

"I don't want to go with you, Emmy," I said; "I want to stop with my father."

He seemed pleased at this; and she laughed and left the room without me. When she was gone, my father closed the door after her, and approached the spot where I stood.

"What makes you want to stay with me, boy?" he said, quietly; "you can't care for me."

"Yes, I do!" I answered, stoutly.

"But why? you have never seen me before."

"Aren't you my father?" I demanded, looking up in his face.

"Well, I believe so," was his reply.

"Then, *that's why*," I conclusively answered. "Don't you care for *me*?"

He stooped quickly and kissed me on the forehead, almost

as tenderly as my mother might have done. It was the first and last kiss that I ever remember to have received from him, and, as I afterwards learnt, was a very rare sign of affection for him to manifest.

"Of course I do," he said, in answer to my question; "and now, young shaver, just cut out of my room, will you, and don't make a fool of yourself."

I never again alluded to the subject of my father's love for me, either in his presence or in that of another; but I knew that it existed, and from that day my heart was warmly knit to his.

Finding that my sister's assertions were true, and that it appeared likely any amount of liberty would be granted me at Grasslands, I spent the remainder of the day in tearing over the house and grounds, and by the time that the late dinner was served, had made acquaintance with every horse in the stables, and every dog upon the premises; and was as perfectly at my ease as it was right that the heir to all the treasures I had been inspecting should be.

I had always been accustomed at Guildford to dine early with my mother and sisters, therefore the late repast was in itself a novelty to me, and the number of strangers amongst whom I found myself a still greater one.

When I entered the drawing-room, rather sheepishly I must confess, notwithstanding the courage I had been displaying outside, I found my two sisters doing the honours of Grasslands to some thirty or forty people, half of whom were my father's resident guests, and most of them distinguished in literature, science, or art.

Parton Estcourt, M.P., and the most powerful author of the day, was a very different person from the Parton Estcourt who had been so eager to marry the daughter of the Earl of Portsdowne in order to raise himself in the scale of society; and, indeed, the whole of his family, partly on account of his popularity, and partly on account of their great wealth, had since then risen in the world.

The fact is, my father's parents were not *parvenus*, as my mother bitterly termed them, but descendants of a good old English family, who had made their money by city trade; and all the sons, with the exception of himself, had been brought up to the same calling as their father. The first

grand quarrel on record between Parton Estcourt and his mother was on the occasion of his steadfast refusal to enter a merchant's office. He was then very young ; but he already felt the *divine afflatus*, and he resolved that his talent should do more for him than money can, and raise him to the position to which he aspired. His first attempts were favourably reviewed, and he began to be talked of and to receive introductions to great persons, and invitations to houses where he had never set foot before. Thus he met my mother, and whether they loved each other or not, she consented to marry him, and his union with Lady Mary Lascelles gave him a lift in the social scale, which his subsequent separation from her was powerless to undo. Then came in a rush, fame, popularity, and attendant wealth, until he stood, at middle age, a *made man* ; made by his own exertions, whilst his immediate relations remained, with the exception of their yearly increasing riches, in much the same position as when they started in life ; and although they never hesitated to partake of my father's hospitality, or to make use of his interest, their jealousy and heart-burning in the contemplation of his success exceeded description. All this, however, I learned afterwards ; my first impression on entering that drawing-room being simply that I had never seen so many pretty ladies and so many gentlemen with bald heads together in my life before. As soon as I made my appearance, my father left a crowd of men about the hearthrug, with whom he was conversing, and, taking my hand, led me into their midst.

"Baynes," he said, to a white-haired old gentleman who looked like a general, "this is my boy ;" "Lord Manners," to another of his friends, "let me introduce Mr Gerald Estcourt to your notice ;" "Jabez ! allow me to present to you my son and heir."

"Fine lad," said the general, approvingly.

"Very !—chip of the old block," quoth his lordship.

"Humph !" growled the gentleman whom my father had addressed by his Christian name, and who proved to be my senior uncle, Jabez Estcourt. He was a stout, red-faced man, considerably shorter than his brother, and regarded me much in the same manner as he would have examined prize stock at a cattle show. His look and his growl, added to the remembrance of my mother's caution, put me on my mettle, and I

turned my back to him, before he had completed his survey. My sister, Lady Henry Claremont, then beckoned me to her side, and made me known to my brother-in-law, whom I had not seen before. She was an amiable girl, and very tender in her manner towards me, and he was a fine bluff young fellow, who was too good-natured to snub a boy. So they kept me beside them, and laughed and joked with me until dinner was announced, when I went downstairs hanging on my sister's bare arm, which made a certain Captain Talbot, who took her in to dinner, say I was a lucky young dog. I did not understand the joke, nor see the particular "luck" of having a sister, but I laughed as in duty bound, and clasped my hands tighter together. Beatrice and Captain Talbot seated me between them, and plied me with kindness and good things; until, after a glass or two of wine, to which I was unaccustomed, my spirits got the better of me, and I laughed and talked loud enough to be heard by every one at table. Presently, as I was giving my neighbour some lively details of my Guildford existence, I mentioned my mother's name—

"Mamma's awfully particular, (I've got a mother living at Guildford, you know,)" I said, looking up in the officer's face. I observed that he bent his eyes upon his plate when I mentioned the fact, and I felt Beatrice's foot press mine beneath the table, but I did not catch the import of these signs, and went on rapidly with my subject.

"Well, she's awfully particular, you know; she never lets me go with other boys, for fear I should learn to swear, or something of the sort, and she's so afraid of tipsy men. You should just see mamma cut across the road if she sees a man coming who doesn't walk quite straight; not a bit drunk you know, it's such fun! but one day when mamma and I"—At this juncture I heard my father cough audibly, and looking up, I perceived Emmeline regarding me fixedly from the other side of the table, and I guessed something was wrong. I thought I had been talking too much, particularly as Beatrice whispered to me to be quiet; so I remained so for the next quarter of an hour. But at the expiration of that time, my new friend Captain Talbot, pitying what he thought my discomfiture, and re-engaging me in conversation, I unfortunately reverted to the forbidden topic.

“Mamma always says”—— I was informing him, when the voice of my father came stern and powerful from the bottom of the table—

“Gerald! hold your tongue; you talk a great deal too much.”

The tone was so severe that it completely silenced me, and whilst the ladies remained with us, I did not again venture to open my mouth. When they had left the room, however, my father beckoned me to his side, where he kept me for the next hour, loading my plate with everything that was on the table. It was his method of silent intimation that he was no longer angry with me, and I accepted it as such, and preferred it greatly to anything like an explanation.

But after I had gone to bed that evening my sister Emmeline came into my room. She said she did so because my mother had always been in the habit of visiting me the last thing at night, and she thought, everything at Grasslands being so strange, that I might miss it. “Not that I intend to come every night, Gerald,” she added, smiling; “you are growing into such a man now, that you must learn to take care of yourself.”

I rolled myself round like a chrysalis in the bed-clothes, and said proudly that I was quite able to do so at the present moment, and that I didn’t want any women to come bothering in my room, when I wished to go to sleep.

She laughed lightly as I spoke, and seated herself upon a corner of my bed. She was still dressed in her evening attire, and I remember wondering why she sat there crushing her flowers instead of going to bed herself. Presently she spoke again, but almost timidly—

“Gerald, dear, papa has asked me to speak to you about something. He doesn’t like to do it himself, for fear you might think that he was finding fault too soon.”

“What is it?” I asked, unrolling in my surprise.

“It’s about mamma, dear. Of course, having lived with her so long, you can’t help thinking of her; but whilst you are at Grasslands you mustn’t mention her name as you did to-day at dinner-time. It vexes papa very much, and it will make him angry if you do it again.”

“Was it *that* which made him speak so crossly to me Emmy?”

I was astonished beyond measure. In my mother's house, although, as I have said, the subject was evidently an unpalatable one, yet we had never been actually forbidden to mention my father's name; on the contrary, we often discussed it in her presence, though she never gave us any voluntary information respecting it. That *hers* was to be a sealed topic at Grasslands had never entered my imagination as likely, and my eyes must have shown the surprise I felt at my sister's communication. She did not answer my last question except by a nod, but continued to sit on the bed with her glance bent sadly on the ground.

"Has mamma been *wicked*, Emmy." I asked in an awed whisper, "that I mustn't even say her name here? Is that why father never came to see us at Guildford, and why we have such a little house, and he has such a large one?"

"Hush! hush! Gerald. No, it's not that. You do not understand the case, dear boy, but I think it is time that you should. Listen to me, and I will try to explain to you how it all occurred."

And then she related how my father and mother had married, and hoped to live happily together all their lives, but that quarrels and misunderstandings had arisen between them, until they considered it better to live in different places, and not to see one another at all, and that was the reason that it gave my father pain to hear her named amongst his guests.

"If all was right between them, Gerald, as it ought to be," said my sister in conclusion, "poor mamma would of course be at the head of the table, but as it is, the only thing to do is to try and forget that she is not there. You see now why you must be careful in future not to revive so disagreeable a topic at Grasslands."

She cried whilst she told me this, and when she had ended her story, my eyes were also moist, although I was ashamed that she should see it. I had partly guessed the truth, but it was the first time that the cause of my parents' separation had been revealed to me; and notwithstanding the admiring affection which my heart had suddenly conceived for my father, my sympathies for the time being were all with my absent mother.

"But if they were *both* wrong, Emmy, as they must have been to quarrel with each other till they were obliged to live

in separate houses, why didn't they each take half the pictures and things? why has my father got so much and my mother so little? We have no carriage or horses at Guildford; the furniture of our house is quite old compared to this; and we have scarcely any pictures, and only three servants. When people marry, don't they promise to share everything together; why should there be such a difference between them?"

I put the question in good faith, sitting up in bed, and looking earnestly at Emmeline for an answer; but it never came. She only said from behind her handkerchief —

"Oh! don't ask me such things, Gerald; it's the law of the land, dear: beyond your understanding or mine."

"Will it never be right, Emmy?" I whispered. "Will poor mamma never come back to live at Grasslands?"

She shook her head.

"I know who did it," I said angrily, clenching my fist; "I know it is all grandmamma's fault; if she hadn't been so unkind, mamma would never have gone to live at that horrid Guildford."

"Who told you that, Gerald?" demanded my sister in surprise.

"No one, but I guessed it, for mamma told me that she was her worst enemy, and that she nearly broke her heart. I *hate* her, Emmy; and when I see her I shall tell her so."

"No, no, Gerald! you mustn't do that, or you will make papa still more angry with you. It is a great misfortune for us all, dear; but the only thing we can do now is to make the best of it, and to live at peace with our relations. Papa has had a great deal of trouble lately, Gerald: he felt poor Lascelles' death very much, and I know he wants them to take kindly to you at Wiversdale. You won't be a naughty boy and disappoint him, will you?"

"Well, I won't tell grandmamma I hate her, then," I said, firmly; "but I shall never love her because she was so unkind to poor mamma."

"I don't think you will, Gerald," replied my sister, more cheerfully, as she prepared to leave me. "If you do, you will be very different from the rest of us, always excepting poor Lascelles; but keep the peace as long as you can, for papa's sake," and kissing me lightly on the forehead, she left the room. But far into the night I lay awake pondering on the

account which I had heard of my parents' separation, and the reason of the great inequality in their establishments. The question puzzled me; it was my first insight to the law of England as exhibited in favour of men *versus* women.

CHAPTER IV

THE ESTCOURTS AT HOME.

THE subject of my *lapsus lingue* on the occasion of my first appearance at the dinner table at Grasslands was not again reverted to; and in a few days I had not only forgotten the annoyance it caused me, but, what was more to the purpose, had learned to throw the things of the past behind my back, at all events when in my father's presence. And in the meanwhile, time was flying by me with lightning speed. The morning after my arrival, my father gave me my first lesson in riding on the pony he had purchased for my use; and from the moment that I could keep my seat in the saddle, I was always by his side. He was exceedingly kind to me, but he was also exceedingly careless; and loitering with him and his guests about the stables and the farm, my boyish understanding received more enlightenment on the wickedness of the world in one week, than it had done in the course of eleven years spent under the shadow of my mother's wing. I was not forbidden to write to her; and the long letters I scrawled privately in my bedroom contained such glowing accounts of my pony and my dog, of the pistols my father had given me, and of my learning to shoot at a mark, that I fear, on retrospection, their receipt must have given the poor soul many a headache. Yet I was but a child, living in the present, and dazzled by the unusual luxury by which I was surrounded; and in my anxiety to impart the happiness I felt to the person with whom I was most familiar, I forgot that these were the very temptations which she so feared would lure my heart from her. Not that any amount of pleasure could have accomplished that, but certainly, whilst ambling on my pony by

the side of my father's hunter, if the thought of soon returning to my dull uninteresting life at Guildford crossed my mind, I used to wish, not that I might never go back to my mother, far from it! but only that she could come to live at Grasslands, and be as happy as I was then.

When I had been there about a week, I heard one morning at breakfast that we were going to spend the day at Wiversdale Manor, to attend a private flower-show which was to be held in the grounds, and at which a large assemblage was expected to be present. The gardens and park which surrounded my grandfather's house were very extensive; and nothing pleased his wife better than to lend them for such purposes as a fancy bazaar or public fête of any kind, which should draw the county families together as partakers of her hospitality; and as it was a break to the monotony of a country visit, my father proposed, on the present occasion, to take all his guests over to see the show. Just before we started, my sister Emmeline came to my room where I had retired for the purpose of dressing. I had never had the felicity then of attending a botanical fête at the Horticultural Gardens, and therefore I was very naturally astounded at the magnificence of her preparations for my grandmother's flower-show. Roses were in her bonnet and her bosom; and her form appeared to be shrouded in white lace and muslin. So that, in my innocence, I thought she looked much fitter to attend a wedding than a country gathering.

"What a swell you are, Emmy!" I exclaimed.

"Am I?" she said carelessly. "Gerald, I only came to ask you one thing; you will not forget what we talked about the first night you came here."

I gave her my promise, and she hurried away; but her appearance had made an alteration in my own plans.

Laying aside the plain tweed clothes with which I had invested myself, I substituted for them a suit of black velvet, arguing that if my sisters thought it necessary to attire themselves so elegantly, it was my part to see that I was dressed in a corresponding manner. As I joined the party downstairs, my father eyed me approvingly; and having handed some of the ladies into an open barouche, told me to jump up on the box-seat of the drag in which he was about to drive

the remainder of his guests. This was a rare treat for me : nothing made me so proud of my father as to see the manner in which he handled the ribbons of his four-in-hand ; and I watched so carefully every movement of his fingers, and talked so animatedly with him on the subject of driving, that he was quite delighted, and swore he would see me drive the drag myself before I left Grasslands.

On the road, jogging along on a stout shooting pony, we passed my uncle Jabez, who, although he was a guest at Grasslands, had refused to go to Wiversdale in either the barouche or the drag.

I had taken a dislike to this brother of my father's, for during the short time that I had spent in his company, he had scarcely ever noticed me except by a grunt ; and as we now flew past him in a cloud of summer dust, and my father lightly raised his whip hand in token of recognition, he neither answered him by sign nor look, but kept solemnly jogging along the side of the hard road, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.

"Uncle Jabez must have seen us," I said, glancing at my father's face.

"He saw us fast enough," was the smiling reply.

"Why doesn't he like you father?" I asked boldly.

"How do you know that he doesn't like me, my boy?"

"Because he's so cross, and so grumpy," I said knitting my brows ; "and the more we laugh and talk, and the happier we are, the grumpier he seems. He can't like us, father ; why doesn't he go home?"

At this ingenuous question my father laughed heartily—so heartily that it was some minutes before he could answer me ; but when he had regained his composure, he said—

"There are a good many excuses for your uncle, Gerald. In the first place, he has never married ; he has consequently no children, and that has been a disappointment to him : in the second, I, his younger brother, have outstripped him in the world, and placed myself in a better position than his, and that is galling to a man. It's the fate of the lucky, Gerald, to excite all manner of evil passions in the breasts of those who are not so prosperous, and it has been my ill fortune to do so amongst such as are nearest to me. I am afraid, as you mix amongst your relations, my boy, that you will find the

feeling of jealousy against ourselves is not confined to the first generation."

"Most of them are as rich as you are, aren't they?" I inquired.

"Much richer, Gerald, only I like to spend my money, and they prefer to save theirs; but it is not a question of mere riches. Wealth alone will not procure them what is to me enjoyment; the society of men and women in a grade of life higher than my own, and the *entrée* to houses where I am welcomed for the sake of the fame I have acquired. There's the rub, Gerald. My brothers have made their fortunes by their hands, and I have made mine by my head, and in the eyes of the world there's a vast difference between the two modes of production. I tell you this, not to make you think yourself better than your relatives, for we are all of the same blood, but that you may remember it in years to come. I want you to follow my example. I shall give you a profession certainly, because no man should be without one; but I hope that you will always consider that you are bound, if possible, to a literary life; to keep up the name which your father has made for you, and to leave your children one that, in their turn, they may be proud of. Let every step you take in life be taken with the idea of raising the family, not lowering it. We'll have no more trade in our branch, my boy, either by blood or connexion."

My father stopped talking, and appeared to be lost in a reverie, caused by his own words. I touched him on the arm.

"I want to be a soldier, father."

He started, and looked pleased.

"And so you shall, Gerald; you shall be anything you choose, soldier or sailor, so long as you are a gentleman. Not an idle, fine gentleman, mind: a shopkeeper would be preferable to that. I have ample means to set you going in the world, without lifting a finger to help yourself, but I shall not do so. Head before hands, my boy, by all manner of means; but work before everything—never forget what I say. An energetic mind will carve out work for itself, even where there is no necessity for labour, from the sheer necessity for action making itself known in its nature. And hereafter you will occupy an important place in the family, Gerald. Failing offspring of your Uncle Jabez, you are eldest son of the eldest

son ; you will not be able to afford to commit one action that will not bear the light of the world's bull's-eye turned upon it ; a false step from you will jeopardise the credit of the whole race. It is a great thing to stand in the position you have acquired through the death of your poor brother ; but you will have need of plenty of circumspection and right judgment to maintain it without having your head turned. But here am I, forgetting that you are only eleven years old, and talking to you as if you were a man of one-and-twenty."

"But I can understand you, father," I urged, "and I like to hear you talk."

"All the better, Gerald ; if you can understand the theory now, perhaps you'll undertake the practice later. But we have had enough of it for to-day. Another ten minutes will bring us to Wiversdale."

Wiversdale Manor was a huge erection of red bricks, built to commemorate the Elizabethan era—ugly, clumsy, and incommensurable. I thought it so on my first acquaintance, and I often wonder to this day why people professing good taste will persist in reviving the imperfections of a bygone age, which ought to have been buried with their designers. As the drag and barouche drew up at the door of the Manor, and the ladies in all their bravery were alighting, my father still kept me close to his side, and would not permit me to enter the house without him. He was evidently determined to be the first to introduce me to the notice of his family. When the whole party was ready, we proceeded to the library, where we were informed that Mrs Estcourt was awaiting us. Lady Henry Claremont and Emmeline were in advance, as they had to introduce several of the guests from Grasslands to their grandmother ; my father and I brought up the rear.

On entering the room, the first figure which struck me was that of my grandmother, and whilst the introductions were going on, I had full opportunity of examining it. She was a fine, tall old woman, of perhaps seventy-five years of age, upright as a dart, and with a most imposing figure. Her complexion was still remarkably fresh, which was made more apparent by the silvery white curls which lay on her forehead ; and she was dressed in gray satin, with a very full cap of white lace and ribbons surrounding her face. As my sister mentioned the names of the ladies and gentlemen who accompanied

them, I saw the lines and muscles of my grandmother's features relax, until she gave vent to that peculiar self-satisfied smile, which, in after years, I came to know so well. Glancing towards a sofa near her, I perceived two hard-featured, middle-aged females, with high cheek-bones, bearing an uncomfortable resemblance to one another, but none at all to the rest of the family : these were my spinster aunts, Sarah and Susan, who had not yet found any one bold enough to transplant them from the home nursery. At the further end of the long room was a lady in such plain attire, that it scarcely seemed as though she could intend mixing in so gay a scene ; and at first I thought she must be the nurse of the lanky red-haired lad of about my own age whom she held on her knee, and about whose freckled face was bound a white pocket handkerchief. But I afterwards learnt that she was my aunt Anne, the wife of Mr Logan, a city stockbroker ; that she despised the vanities of this world too much ever to appear out of cotton or linsey-wolsey ; and that the red-haired boy was her youngest son, Thomas Logan, of whom I shall have more to say by-and-by. With the quickness of a child, I had taken in all this, before my turn came to be presented to Mrs Estcourt. Notwithstanding the graciousness of her smiles to my father's guests, I had noted the "sniff" with which she had greeted my sisters ; and as I now advanced it did not appear as if she was disposed to give me a much more favourable reception.

"Mother !" said my father, rather bluntly, (all the Estcourts were blunt in their speech,) "here is my son Gerald, whom I trust some day to see the head of the family, so I hope you will be good friends with him."

"Humph !" said my grandmother ; "some day is no day." With closed eyes, and the corners of her mouth turned down, she then presented her face for me to kiss. I stood on tiptoe, and perceiving various little silvery bristles springing up about her chin, made a shot for a smooth place, and lighted just upon the ribbon which crossed her ear. Then she opened her eyes, and condescended to look at me.

"Do you see any likeness to poor Lascelles ?" asked my father in a low tone, as she scanned my physiognomy.

"Pooh !" she said rudely, "not the least : he's just like Anne."

"What Anne ?" I demanded, with surprise.

"Your sister, Lady Henry," replied my grandmother, with much acerbity in the pronunciation of the title.

"She's not *Anne*," I said indignantly, "her name is Beatrice."

Now my eldest sister's name was "Beatrice Anne," but she had never been called by the second title except by Mrs Estcourt; and it appeared that her pertinacity in mentioning the girl by no other name had devolved into a joke at Grasslands. But of this I was unaware.

"*You* may not call her *Anne*," replied my grandmother, testily; "but it is her name, nevertheless, and a very pretty name too, and far more suitable for a young woman, in my opinion, than any of the fiddle-faddle names of the present day."

A storm appeared to be brewing; and Emmeline, who possessed the sweetest of tempers, thought to avert it by remarking playfully—

"Well! if second names are to be the order of the day, grand-mamma, I suppose I must drop 'Emmeline,' and be known as 'Mary.'"

"I hate 'Mary!'" retorted my grandmother, sharply.

"It's mamma's name!" I exclaimed, firing up, "and I *love* it."

All that I had heard concerning the cruelty of the old lady before me towards my mother flashed into my mind, and I dare say I looked as indignant as I felt.

"Hoity, toity, young man!" said my grandmother, peering at me over her spectacles, "I don't think your manners say much for your bringing-up."

I was sorry I had spoken then, and glanced timidly at my father to see what effect my careless words might have had upon him; but he had turned in my defence upon Mrs Estcourt.

"Then what on earth induced you to speak in that way before the child? Gerald! go into the garden with Emmeline; I shall see you there by-and-by;" and as I left the room, he continued, angrily, "You'll find, mother, that that boy has inherited a goodly spice of the family devil, and is not to be twisted round a finger. He is very different from poor Lascelles." I heard no more, for I followed my sisters and their friends into the grounds of Wiversdale, where the gay scene I

witnessed soon drove the memory of my grandmother's reception out of my head. Erected on the lawn which stretched at the back of the house were two or three large marquees, filled with contributions of fruit, flowers, and vegetables, from the best gardens in Dorset ; whilst scattered over the adjoining park might be seen the numerous visitors to the show, walking and conversing with one another, or sitting in groups, whilst the gentlemen of the party supplied them with refreshments from the luncheon tents.

As Beatrice and Emmeline sauntered amidst the crowd, nodding on the right hand and the left, and mentioning the names of the people to me, I thought that no one had ever been blessed with such a number of cousins before, and that my father's family appeared to have no end. There were the William Estcourts, who lived in London, and took upon themselves to be pert in consequence, and to make patronising remarks upon the fashion of my sisters' dresses ; and there were the Abel Estcourts, whose father had been converted by, and married to, the relict of a South African missionary, who had been boiled down for the stock-pot in the course of his labours, which melancholy end could not be forgotten by his widow even in a second state of wedded happiness ; in consequence of which she dressed the young Abel Estcourts in poke bonnets and duffle cloaks, and forbade them to smile or speak like ordinary mortals. On which account they credited themselves with such superior sanctity to the rest of the family, that our branch was altogether too bad for them to attempt association with ; and after one of them had given me a tract, which I stuck in a profane manner in the band of my cap, (until Emmeline took it from me,) they passed on, and molested us no further.

Then we met the Joshua Estcourts, who came from the remotest recesses of the earth, somewhere about twenty miles from a market town, and yet gave themselves all the airs of London belles, and were so extremely ladylike, that they could not pick a strawberry, or a rose, without putting kid gloves on ; and were reported to dress themselves, for making a tour of inspection of their father's pigsties, in the same fashion that they would have done for a stroll in Hyde Park.

My aunt, Mrs Logan, was the mother of only three sons, the two elder of whom, bearing a strong resemblance to her youngest

darling, were lounging about on the lawn, grinning and whispering in an awkward manner to one another, and meeting the kindly advances of my sisters with the confusion of schoolboys, followed by an explosion of rude laughter as soon as their backs were turned, for which I thirsted to knock them down. Here, also, was my poor old grandfather being wheeled about in an invalid chair; but as he had quite lost his memory, and almost his senses, it was useless for Emmeline to try and make him understand who I was. He only nodded his feeble head, and said, "Yes, my dear; yes, my dear: just so," to whatever she advanced, and so remained till the date of his death, which happened about four years afterwards; a nonentity in the household; something which had to be fed and clothed, and looked after, but of whom, those duties being fulfilled, no one took any further notice.

I remarked that all the Estcourts seemed more at home with each other than they were with my sisters, and that they were quick to catch up any word they said, and either cavil at or contradict it. I observed, also, that whilst Beatrice, hanging in all her pride upon the arm of her young husband, seemed to take the keenest pleasure in following up their unprovoked attacks, until she had fairly driven them into a corner, Emmeline attempted, by her gentle answers and explanations, to conciliate them towards herself. Yet I must say, however much I admired the latter course of action, that my sympathies were more in unison with those of my eldest sister. Indeed, Beatrice and I were the most alike of all our family, in disposition as well as in appearance; but being masculine, in love of mischief I perhaps outstripped her.

Presently the library party issued from the house, and I saw Mrs Estcourt, in her gray satin dress, moving about the lawn, attended by at least half a dozen of her granddaughters, all eager to carry her shawl, or her parasol, or to offer an arm for her acceptance.

"How they all *toady* her!" exclaimed Beatrice, with an air of the greatest contempt, as she watched their proceedings.

"But, my darling, she is their grandmother," said her husband, who did not always acquiesce in his young wife's opinions, "and it is quite right that they should pay her a little attention."

"Oh, I should be the last person to find fault with that,

Harry, if it were only genuine ; but you should hear those very girls abuse her behind her back. They hate 'doing duty' quite as much as Emmy or I should do, but they profess to like it, for fear of being cut out of her will. That's at the bottom of it all."

"Hush, Beatrice!" said Emmeline, cautiously, "Uncle Jabez is close behind us."

"Is he?" exclaimed my incorrigible sister aloud, as she turned her head to ascertain the truth ; "oh ! so he is—well, I don't care if he heard me say so."

And he evidently had heard her, for the next minute he passed us with a grunt, and was soon deep in earnest conversation with his sister, Mrs Logan, whose eyes, directed to the spot where we stood, betrayed the subject which they were discussing.

It was not long before my father extricated himself from the circle which surrounded his mother and joined ours instead ; but he made no remark upon the incident which had caused our temporary separation, and only proposed an immediate adjournment to the luncheon-tent. Conducting us thither, he made himself completely at home, without any reference to the outraged feelings of his maiden sisters, Sarah and Susan, who had installed themselves within its precincts, and would have wished the table to remain as unmolested as they were likely to be themselves.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH GERALD MAKES AN IMPRESSION ON HIS FRIENDS.

BUT when luncheon was over, and my father had left us again, Beatrice wandered into the shrubberies with her husband, and Emmeline was taken possession of by Captain Talbot, who was the best looking man on the ground, and I, grown weary of watching the company stroll up and down the paths in an aimless manner, strolled away myself through a splendid flower-parterre, into an ornamental farmyard, which I quickly vacated

again, having lamed a large Muscovy drake, that flew at my legs. The farmyard led, by a circuitous route, through an adjacent paddock, to an artificial lake, the banks of which were planted with flowering shrubs, and were not far distant from the palings which enclosed the park. On the lake was floating a small boat, which I had seen and been tempted by from a distance ; but when I reached the edge of the water, I found that my design of having a row had been anticipated, and that two lads were busily engaged in endeavouring to unloose the boat from her moorings.

These were my cousins, Joshua Estcourt, a son of my uncle William, and Thomas Logan, whose face was still bound up in the pocket-handkerchief ; and as I came suddenly upon them from behind the bushes which clothed the sides of the lakelet, they scowled at me, and said nothing. But they were boys, and however unprepossessing in manner or appearance, I was drawn towards them on that account ; and I desired to make one of the boat's crew.

"Halloa ! cousins," I commenced, trying to speak in a friendly voice, notwithstanding the want of cordiality displayed in their countenances, "are you bound for a row ? I'll go with you."

The boy Thomas Logan looked me in the face in a sulky manner as I addressed them, and then, without speaking, he stooped, and, gathering up a large handful of mud and slime from the bank, threw it right upon my velvet suit, where it remained clinging in a filthy mass to my waistcoat and trousers ; whilst the other lad, who was a foolish-looking, pudding-faced fellow, put his hand up before his mouth, and giggled like a girl. I felt as if all the blood in my body rushed to my face.

"What did you do that for ?" I exclaimed, hotly.

"Find out," replied Thomas Logan, with an insensate leer, as he proceeded with the unmooring of the boat.

"I *will* find out," I said, advancing towards him ; "and I will give you something to remember me by into the bargain."

They were both bigger and older than myself ; but at my words they leapt simultaneously into the pleasure-boat, which was by this time free ; and pushing a little way from shore, where they thought they should be safe, sat and grinned at me in a way very difficult for a hot spirit like mine to bear with patience.

"You're a pair of cowards!" I exclaimed from the bank above them. "You're a couple of snobs! if you were gentlemen, you would be glad to fight when a gentleman asks you to do so."

"We are quite as much gentlemen as you are, so come," sneered Thomas Logan in his fancied security, "though you do think so much of your fine black velvet *frock*. Aren't we a lady, Josh?"

The sarcasm was too much. My father's words were ringing in my ears, and I forgot my sister Emmeline's caution, and everything but the insult offered me.

"You are not gentlemen," I shouted; "your fathers are only shopkeepers in the city, and I wouldn't dirty my hands by fighting you."

I saw Thomas Logan change colour at my address; and Joshua Estcourt took up as much water as his hand would hold and threw it at me. After a pause, the other said, as if driven to use his last missile—

"Your mother ran away!"

"It's a lie!" I exclaimed, and with a sudden run I leapt off the bank, and into the boat itself. Her occupants were quite unprepared for the assault; and as they rose in confusion to receive me, the little craft rocked backwards and forwards with the unequal balance. But I thought of nothing but pummelling the head of Thomas Logan. Dashing forward, I brought my inexperienced blows to bear as well as I could upon the eyes and nose of my adversary, perfectly heedless of either the danger in which I placed the boat, or the screams for help of Joshua Estcourt, which, the lake being on a level with the lawn, soon brought the gentlemen leaping over the fence which divided us from them; and the ladies clustering together outside it, eager to know what was the matter. It was lucky as it happened that they did so, for in another minute our struggles had made the little boat heel over, and we were all three floundering in the water together. The accident was unattended with danger, as, although we could not swim, help was at hand as soon as needed, and my cheek was still flushed with excitement as my father landed me on the side of the lake. I was wet through, of course; but as I shook the water from my hair, and the hair from my eyes, and saw the figure of Thomas Logan in the arms of Captain Tal-

bot, I freed myself from my father's grasp, and darted forward to attack him again. But a strong hand pinioned me from behind.

"Gently, Gerald," said the now familiar voice, "you've had enough of fighting for to-day; what is all this about?"

Then I looked up, and saw that we were surrounded by a number of gentlemen, amongst whom were my uncles Jabez and William, and Mr Logan, the father of my foe.

"All about!" I repeated proudly, "why, he insulted me, father; and I'll teach him what it is to insult the 'head of the family.'"

"The head of *what*?" exclaimed my uncle Jabez, fixing the eye of a hawk upon me. "What is the boy talking about, Sampson?"

"The head of the family," I repeated boldly, looking him straight in the face; "for that's what I shall be, when we are all grown up."

I fancied I saw a smile lurking about the corners of my father's mouth as I spoke, but he forced it down, and said to me gravely, "Whatever you may be in course of time, Gerald, you are only a boy now, and you have no business to fight your cousins, or call them abusive names: I am very angry with you."

"I'll fight him again," I said determinately, "as soon as ever I have an opportunity."

"Pray, what does your son mean by this obstinacy, Mr Estcourt?" said my uncle Logan, appealing to my father.

"I mean that your son is no gentleman, sir," I said defiantly, "and that I told him so, and that he is a coward, and I told him that also."

"And you said that Joshua's father and mine were shopkeepers," here put in Thomas Logan from behind the shelter of Captain Talbot's person.

"Gerald, is that true?" asked my father sternly.

"Yes, it is, father," I replied; "you know you said yourself, as we were coming here, that they had all made their money by trade, except you."

My father was completely taken aback.

"That's the way Sampson, is it, that you bring up your children to think of your family?" said my uncle Jabez, angrily.

"But I shouldn't have said so, father," I interposed

eagerly, desirous only to clear his character in his brother's eyes, "if they hadn't thrown mud at me, and called me a 'lady,' and behaved like shopkeepers' boys; and I shouldn't have fought them even for that, only they said my mother ran away, and she didn't, father, did she?" I concluded, looking up into his face.

All my dread of mentioning the forbidden name had vanished in my desire to exculpate myself and him. My father's countenance darkened with anger.

"No! my boy, she didn't," he replied with an oath; and if Thomas Logan, or any one else, dares to say so again, I'll thrash him within an inch of his life. Come on, Gerald; I'm very glad you fought him, and I wish you had licked him well."

And, linking my arm within his own, my father walked sternly away from the little group, leaving his brothers, doubtless, in anything but an enviable state of mind at the scrape which their sons had led them into with the most powerful member of the family. Of course, as soon as we had reached the lawn, the whole story, with the exception of the part which entailed the mention of my mother's name, was repeated for the benefit of my grandmother and her guests, and many were the unflattering comments which were passed on the share I had taken in the business. Mrs Estcourt and her daughters were indignant because my father stedfastly took my part throughout the recital, and dwelt with malicious enjoyment upon the fact of my having called myself the "head of the family" in the face of my uncle Jabez. My aunt, Mrs Logan, bristled with rage as she heard the treatment her poor suffering boy had undergone at my hands, and her longing to give me a good box on the ears was depicted on every line of her countenance; however, she was compelled to content herself with casting withering looks at me, as she hastened to see the extent of injury his aching tooth had sustained from the sudden trial of the "cold-water cure" to which it had been subjected; and my sisters gathered round me, regardless of the dripping condition of my attire, and covering me with kisses, expressed their intention of returning home with me at once.

"He must not remain in his wet suit, papa," said Emmeline anxiously; "pray let us go as soon as the carriage can be got ready."

"There is no need for you to accompany him, Emmy," he replied ; "I have had enough of gaiety for to-day, and Gerald can return with me."

But both my sisters insisted upon bearing my father and myself company to Grasslands ; and their guests appeared as ready to take their departure as themselves.

"Very eager to go," remarked my grandmother, who was not overpleased to see such a fuss made about my insignificant self, or her flower-show thinned so early of some of its brightest ornaments.

"Of course, grandmamma," laughed Beatrice, mischievously ; "it is quite right we should be anxious about the health of such an important personage as Gerald ; eldest son of the eldest son remember ! it is not as if he came of a younger branch."

My grandmother made no answer to this speech, and the surrounding cousins looked away, and pretended not to have heard it. I was hurried from Wiversdale with scarcely so much as a farewell from my new relations ; and I dare say that the remarks, passed upon me as soon as my back was turned, were not such as I would have cared to hear. I was placed inside the barouche with my sisters this time, for warmth's sake, and did not see my father again, until, having changed my wet garments and made myself comfortable, I descended to the library at home. He was the sole occupant, and was evidently thinking deeply, but as I entered the room he raised his head and viewed me kindly.

"Well, Gerald, are you dry again, eh ?—that's right ; but next time you fight, I advise you to do so upon *terra firma*. I am not sorry that it has happened ; it will teach your cousins to keep civil tongues in their heads towards you for the future ; but it has been an unfortunate introduction to the notice of your grandmother. I'm afraid you'll have to content yourself with what shillings I can leave you, my boy ; you'll never take poor Lascelles' place at Wiversdale now."

Then I knew that my father had wished my grandmother and my uncle Jabez to take a fancy to me, and make me heir of Wiversdale, which would naturally devolve on the eldest grandson, if he acquitted himself with satisfaction in the eyes of those who had the power to leave it him. Yet, child as I was, I felt thankful that it was not likely that I should ever

be placed under such an obligation to the people who had made my mother's married life unhappy. I had thought very little of the *reason* for which the quarrels between herself and my father took place. It had never entered my youthful imagination to sit down and seriously consider whose fault it had been that this great shadow had been permitted to darken the lives of my sisters and myself. It had never struck me then (as it did in after years) that, however much the enmity of my grandmother and aunts and uncles towards my mother may have irritated and annoyed her, if she had maintained a loving and amiable course of conduct towards her husband, his mother's influence would probably have had no power to come between them as it did. I only saw the effects of the separation in the misery it had entailed upon herself ; and naturally I was on my mother's side, and opposed to all (except my father) who were opposed to her ; and his estrangement from her I attributed solely to the same agency which had wrecked her happiness before she left him. The affection and duty which I knew that I owed to both parents, but which my loyalty to each seemed to preclude my showing to the other, was a puzzle which I was as yet too young to solve, and which perplexed me so much that I always put the thought of it away from my mind whenever it arose to trouble me ; but the malice of Mrs Estcourt towards my mother (from whatever cause it may have arisen) was quite easy for me to understand ; and in proportion to the resentment which the subject invariably kindled in my breast, was the hidden satisfaction which I now felt at the idea that I should never be called upon to acknowledge myself a debtor to those who had been enemies of hers. My father had said that he wished me to rise by my abilities, as he had done by his ; and thinking over his conversation, I resolved that, some day, I would set myself as far above Thomas Logan and Joshua Estcourt, and the rest of the rising generation, as he had done above the last.

These were not good thoughts for a child's heart to harbour ; but those who sow the seed must answer for the harvest ; and from my earliest years, circumstances may be said to have separated me from my relations, and marked me out to run the race which was before me, alone. But however lightly my father may have seen fit (owing to the counter-irritation produced on him at the time by my cousin's insolence) to pass

over my *escapade* at Wiversdale, the occurrence had greatly vexed him ; and I perceived, to my chagrin, that the remembrance of it did not quit his mind for many days afterwards. More than once during that period, when we were alone, he purposely drew our conversation into the channel which occupied his thoughts, and endeavoured by stories, which bore favourably upon the characters of the various members of his family, to disabuse my mind of the impression which, as he imagined, it had received from the words which he had spoken to me on the box-seat of the drag. But my dislike to everybody and everything at Wiversdale had far deeper root than my father thought. It had been sown in my infancy and nurtured with my growth, and no mere argument could have the power to root it out. Several times during the remainder of my stay at Grasslands did I accompany him and my sisters to my grandfather's house ; but Mrs Estcourt's behaviour towards me never increased in cordiality ; on the contrary, she seemed to dislike me more each time she saw me. From what I have heard, I fancy that my brother Lascelles was a very different character from myself ; he appears to have been of a timid, retiring nature, easily cowed, (probably on account of his delicate health,) and used to give in to his grandmother's will in everything. With such a disposition she must, with her love of tyranny and despotism, have been in her glory ; and consequently the bold fearlessness of mine, (so like both my father's and mother's,) struck her as a most unpleasant contrast.

I was too little afraid of her, and of Wiversdale ; too apt to blurt out my worthless opinions ; altogether too independent. So Mrs Estcourt dubbed me before she had seen me a second time, and from the first hour of our meeting one was as indifferent as the other. I do not believe she looked upon me as the brother of Lascelles, nor even as my father's son. To her I was the child of Lady Mary, who had been reared beneath my mother's supervision, endowed with all her affection, and doubtless taught to return it as a son should do, and that circumstance alone would have been sufficient to estrange me from the heart of Mrs Estcourt.

I believe she had favoured Lascelles simply because retaining possession of him asserted the supremacy of her will over that of her son's wife ; and that if there had been any division in the matter, any question of the boy sharing his time and

his duty between her and Lady Mary, that her interest in him would have taken flight, and she would have resigned the charge altogether.

But the endeavours of my father, since Lascelles was dead, to instal me in the vacant place fell utterly to the ground. I could never, at the age I was then, have been given over entirely to my grandmother as he had been, and therefore she regarded me as the exclusive property of her daughter-in-law, and disliked me accordingly. We had more than one quarrel (such a quarrel as can take place between a young boy and an old woman) during my stay at Grasslands ; and as she never took any pains to hide her indifference, neither did I to conceal the dislike with which her conduct inspired me.

Her behaviour to my father was a puzzle. I could not determine whether she did or did not love him. She was *brusque* and rough in her manner of speaking to everybody, and he was almost as much so as herself. She generally received any communication he made relative to his plans or actions with an objection, often followed by a quarrel between them ; but I observed, that although my father never gave in to her on a single point, or even made a concession in her favour, the effects of their disagreements appeared to vanish as if by magic, leaving them both the same as before, which is not the usual case with people who have been squabbling.

I attribute the cause of this to the fact that Mrs Estcourt (notwithstanding that her high temper made them occasionally differ) was very proud of her son, and anxious, for politic reasons, to keep friends with him ; although in that case, being obliged (on account of his obstinacy) to defer to his opinions, her spirit inwardly chafed at the humiliation, and caused her to be outwardly cold towards him.

It can scarcely be imagined that I was sufficiently precocious to arrive at these shrewd conclusions at the tender age of eleven ; but remembering what I thought then, and comparing it with my observations of later years, has enabled me to draw the inference, which I now present, in order to bring my readers to a better understanding with the characters of some of the principal personages of my story.

CHAPTER VI.

SCHOOLBOY DAYS AT ETON.

I HAD been two months at Grasslands: it was the middle of July when I arrived there, and Michaelmas was now near at hand. I had spent the time as happily as it was possible for a boy to do, passing the days either with my father's friends or the stable-men, and the evenings with my sisters in the more refined circle of the drawing-room. The contrast between my associates was striking, and it is to be hoped that the evening influence had sometimes the power to dispel much of that of the morning, for in general the latter was not the best to which I might have been subjected. One day, about the close of the second month, my father addressed me abruptly.

"Gerald, would you like to go to school?"

"To a boys' school, father?—yes."

I had confided to him, during some of our conversations, the dreary solitude which I endured whilst studying with my old tutor at Guildford, and he had fully sympathized with me. Now, the idea of daily and hourly mixing with a large number of companions struck me with a keen sense of enjoyment, and I followed my assent with a string of eager inquiries—

"Am I really going to school, father, and when?"

He nodded, amused at my evident excitement. "Really and truly: I have decided to send you to Eton this term."

"To Eton! that's down by Windsor, isn't it?" Then a melancholy vision of my mother, and what she would say to the proposed plan, rose up before me to check my enthusiasm, and my countenance changed so rapidly that my father observed it.

"How now, Gerald, what's the matter?"

"When shall I start, father?"

"I want to send you at once, that is, in a fortnight from this time."

"Shan't I go home first?" I demanded rather timidly, for since Emmeline had spoken on the subject to me I had been

shy (except on that one memorable occasion) of alluding to my mother before him.

"You will go to Guildford for a week first," he replied, with a stress upon the name of the place, as if he would tell me that in future my *home* would be with himself.

"And how soon, father?"

"Next Thursday, my boy. My tailor has orders to take your measure as you pass through London, and he will send your outfit after you to Guildford. All other arrangements will, of course, be made for you."

I was sorrow to leave Grasslands; but I was anxious to see my mother again, and to tell her, by word of mouth, of the wondrous life I had been living since we parted; and I was elated at the prospect of going to a public school, and no longer being limited to girls for my playfellows. The party at Grasslands, too, was about to break up. The Claremonts were bound north, for the purposes of shooting; my father and Emmeline intended wintering in Paris, and their guests were commencing to disperse in various directions. Therefore, it was not altogether with a heavy heart that I took my departure for the place which I still considered my home—a servant accompanying me, as before, part of the way, and seeing me safely deposited in the train for Guildford, an attention which I resented as an indignity to my lately acquired experience.

It was evening when I arrived at Guildford. The days were beginning to close in early and feel chilly, and the lamps were already lighted at the station. The first thing I caught sight of as the train stopped was the face of my mother beneath the gas, peering anxiously forward to ascertain if I was amongst the passengers. I leapt out of the carriage, and in another minute was in her arms.

"My dear Gerald!" she exclaimed, "my own boy; how late you are; I expected you by the five o'clock train, and we have been waiting here for more than an hour."

Then I turned and saw that Gertrude was with her. How dowdy they both looked to me, in their close bonnets and dark cloaks, after the fashionable ladies I had been used to mix with at Grasslands!

"Why did you wait, mother?" I said in answer, "I should have come on all right. I was obliged to stop in town to let Stultz take my measure, and the brute kept me at his place

for nearly an hour. Halloo ! that 's mine !" I exclaimed to a passing porter, who was conveying my portmanteau out of sight.

"Very good, sir. Fly, sir ?"

"Fly !—of course, and put the luggage on ; there 's a hamper in the van. Come along, mother."

"Couldn't we walk, dear ?" interposed my mother, "it 's not far, you know, and the things might go on a truck."

"Oh, very well ! I don't care which it is," I said carelessly, issuing a fresh order to the porter, "we 'll walk, if you like ; but it 's getting rather cold, isn't it !"

I linked my arm in my mother's in the old familiar fashion as I spoke, and she pressed it closely to her side ; but as we left the station, I heard her sigh, although she turned it off with a laughing invitation to Gertrude to observe what a man I had grown since they had seen me last.

Her house was one of a terrace, easy of access from the railway station, and we soon reached it, and found my younger sisters waiting to give me a hearty welcome home again. My portmanteau and hamper arrived almost as soon as I did, and were placed in my old room ; and of course I was eager to unpack them at once, and display the presents I had received whilst absent, and those which I had been entrusted to bring for my sisters. But as I was rushing up the stairs, my mother spoke to me from the hall—

"Not now, my dear boy," she urged, "there is no time ; wait till afterwards."

"It won't take me a minute, mother," I replied, "and I must wash my hands before dinner."

"Dinner, child ! *tea* you mean ; we had dinner as usual at half-past one."

I stood still on the staircase for a second, as though to recollect myself, and then I said—

"Oh, yes—to be sure—I forgot. Well, I 'll be down to tea, mother, before it is on the table."

But hungry as I was after my long journey, I could not attack that meal with the same relish that I had been used to do, for since living at Grasslands I had been accustomed to have my dinner at that hour, and I missed it. My mother quickly perceived and taxed me with my want of appetite ; but I denied the fact, and made fresh assaults on the bread

and butter and marmalade, attributing my lack of hunger to the luncheon I had had whilst passing through London.

"But why don't you dine late, mother, as we do at Grasslands?" I asked, in continuation of the subject, and quite overlooking the plural pronoun which I had inadvertently used.

"Because it is not so convenient, Gerald, in a small household," she answered, in a tone of offence; "neither is it so desirable for children as dining early."

Her manner silenced me, and I felt conscious of the mistake I had made, which her coolness for the remainder of the meal did not render easy of forgetfulness; and even after tea was cleared away it was little better. All my efforts to draw her into familiar conversation proved vain; and when my sisters clustered round me, and I commenced to talk with them of all I had been seeing and doing during our separation, my mother took up a book, and installed herself with a reading-lamp at the furthest end of the room, where she appeared to be not only perfectly devoid of interest in anything I said, but scarcely conscious that I spoke at all. Emboldened by this proceeding, I was describing with great animation the beauties of Grasslands, and the pleasures I had experienced there, (interrupted every now and then by an exclamation of surprise, or a wish that they had been present from Lily or Marguerite,) when I saw my mother rise hastily from her seat and leave the room, and as she passed the corner where we were assembled, I caught a glimpse of her tearful eyes. Gertrude saw them also, and begged me at once to drop the subject.

"It cannot be a pleasant one for poor mamma," she said, (and as she spoke the conversation I had held with Emmeline at Grasslands returned vividly to my mind;) "do try to talk of something else, Gerald, whilst you are at Guildford. It will not be for many days, remember."

It was easy to tell a young boy, whose heart was full of the novel pleasures he had experienced and strange sights he had seen, to hold his tongue and keep his confidences to himself; but the result was, that I felt under so much constraint whilst I remained with my mother that I cannot have appeared to her as the same child who had left her care but two short months before, and she doubtless laid all the change to the influence to which I had been exposed at Grasslands. I did not wish to wound her; at the same time, gratitude to my father

for the kindness he had shown me seemed to forbid that I should ignore the subject. I was troubled in my mind, therefore. I no longer felt open towards my mother as I had been in the days gone by, because I knew that my breast was full of feelings which were the last she would wish to know I cherished ; and young as I was, what I felt during that first visit paid to the home in which I had been reared none can understand except those who, like myself, have been tossed backward and forward, like a shuttlecock between two battledores, from one influence to another.

It was not the inferiority of the rooms or furniture in the house at Guildford, compared to what I had been lately accustomed to, that affected me, (although they certainly looked very small and dingy after the magnificent apartments at Grasslands,) for children do not care for outward appearances ; but I missed the excitement of my father's house ; I missed the noise and the laughter, the singing and the talking, after which the silence of death seemed to reign over the well-ordered little establishment of my mother.

She was disappointed, also, and vexed with me ; she imagined that I regretted the lentils and pottage of Egypt more than I did, and that I cared nothing for returning to my quiet home. She had always been of a petulant and uncertain disposition ; now she was positively cross, and rebuked me sharply upon very small occasions. Everything was a grievance. Of course she had been apprised of the plan for my going to Eton before I returned to her ; but the facts of my outfit having been ordered to be supplied by my father's tailors in London, of my hair having been cut very short during my absence, and, worst of all, of my wearing kid gloves, and sporting a little dandy cane which my father had given me, (good-naturedly thinking that it would please my boyish fancy,) were all visited by my mother upon my head. She disliked to see the pleasure I took in such things ; and any possession I had acquired during my two months' absence, or accomplishment I had learned, or fresh habit or expression I had taken up, was looked upon as a special slight to herself, and resented upon me.

One day she came upon me suddenly as I was sitting in a corner of my sisters' schoolroom, poring over a copy of my father's old novel, "*Gerald Trevor*," and which he had given me, because, as he said, the hero was my godfather. It was

a stirring tale, which had been very fashionable at the time of its publication, a story of "fast life" undoubtedly, but containing nothing that could injure the mind of a lad of the age I had then attained; and I was deeply interested in it, so much so, that I did not hear my mother's approach until she was close by my side.

"What are you reading, Gerald?" she demanded. Her voice had already put on an offended tone, for she had guessed my study from the binding of the volume, and I dare say that I coloured as I replied—

"Only 'Gerald Trevor,' mother."

"Only 'Gerald Trevor!'" she exclaimed, with a sudden impulse of passion; "have I not forbidden you, again and again, to read any book without first asking my permission? How dare you?" and seizing the volume from my hand, she flung it to the other end of the room. "Don't let me see you reading that, Gerald, or any other such trash, whilst you remain in my house. They may try to contaminate your mind at Grasslands, and to alienate your heart from me and your sisters, if they choose, but for the short time you are under my care I shall do my duty by you," and white with emotion she left the room; whilst I picked up my injured book, and said between my teeth, as I attempted to smooth its creased pages—

"By Jove! I shall be jolly glad when this is all over."

This was not the way to retain a boy's affection. My mother's jealousy was so great that it permitted her altogether to lose sight of my happiness during the short time I stayed at Guildford; and such behaviour on her part was least calculated to win me back to herself, or to make the glories of Grasslands, where I had had both love and liberty, fade in the distance. Consequently I was delighted when the moment arrived for me to go to Eton, and as the arrangement had been that I should only stay ten days at Guildford, I had not long to wait. I left my mother and sisters with too much happiness, I am afraid, thoughtlessly depicted on my face; a well-lined purse and luxuries in general quite sufficient to ensure me a welcome in the little world for which I was bound.

This time I was considered competent to travel by myself; and, glad as I was to go, I remember how the tears momentarily dimmed my eyes as the train rushed panting away from

the station, and I instinctively felt that, excepting as a visitor, I had seen the last of Guildford and my mother's home.

I have no intention of entering minutely into the chronicles of my school life, which extended over five years from the time I first entered upon it, for I have already lingered, longer perhaps than is advisable, over the details of my childhood. And yet those five years contained more of pure and unalloyed happiness for me than it can ever be my lot to feel again. Fortune followed me to Eton ; and the usual sense of loneliness, which every boy must feel upon leaving home for a public school, did not exist for me after the first twelve hours. At the end of that time, as I was sitting by myself on a low wall in the playground, thinking rather despondently, as boy after boy rushed past without taking any notice of me, that school wasn't half so "jolly" as I had anticipated, I heard a clatter of feet which came my way, and next a genial voice, though rather out of breath, exclaiming—

"Halloa, Estcourt! why haven't you looked us up? We didn't hear of your arrival till after class this morning."

I raised my eyes, and saw before me a lad of about fifteen years of age ; tall and fair, with an open expressive countenance, and a look of the greatest good-humour. Beside him stood a younger boy of perhaps twelve, who bore too strong a resemblance to him to leave any doubt of the relationship which existed between them. Totally ignorant of who they were, I yet descended from my perch with alacrity, only too pleased with the prospect of companionship, before with inquiring eyes I put the question—

"But I say—what are your names?"

The younger boy burst into a fit of laughter and exclaimed, "That's a good 'un ;" whilst the eldest, who appeared to me to be quite a man, looked amused as he replied—

"Why, we're your first cousins, Estcourt. Haven't you heard of the Lascelles?"

Of course I had ; but no one had thought it worth his while to tell me I should meet them here.

"I'm Jack," interposed the younger brother, "and he's George ; never mind though ; come on and I'll show you no end of larks."

"Wait a minute, Jack," said George Lascelles, "I want to speak to Estcourt first. Fancy your not knowing that this

was our cramming-house ! Why father told us you were coming here as far back as the middle of last vacation, and I thought my uncle only sent you to be near us—it's all one though. What I wanted to tell you is, that I've managed to get you for my fag, and you may consider yourself a precious lucky young fellow to be so."

"Oh, is he lucky?" exclaimed the Honourable Jack Lascelles, (for these boys were the two younger sons of the Earl of Portsdowne.) "I wouldn't be you for something, Estcourt. I fag for Grimshaw, and he's bad enough, but Lascelles major is about the biggest bully in Eton."

Lascelles major gave a good-natured smile.

"Don't you believe him, Estcourt, and don't let him lead you into mischief—otherwise, perhaps, he is as good a guide as you could have to the ins and outs of the place. And now, Jack, don't forget what I've been telling you:" and with a look of warning which the Honourable Jack resented by sticking his tongue in his cheek as soon as his brother's back was turned, George Lascelles walked away and left us to ourselves.

This was my first introduction to the cousins with whom I was ever afterwards on terms of the greatest intimacy, and it proved of infinite service to me. Eton, like all other places where there is an assemblage of classes, has its tuft-hunters, and the fact of my being nephew to Lord Portsdowne and first cousin to the Lascelles, who were popular in the school, brought me under the notice of several of the most influential boys there, and saved me doubtless from many a back-ache and heart-ache.

From the beginning, George Lascelles stood my protector and my friend, and I looked up to him with that species of admiring affection with which boys and girls are apt to regard those of their own sex a little older and more experienced than themselves; whilst Jack was my inseparable companion, the sharer in all my exploits, either of fun or danger, as well as in the punishments which invariably followed our detection; and when George left school about a year after I had entered it, my youngest cousin and myself were known as the two wildest, most daring, and most incorrigible boys in Eton.

I throve and flourished there, both in mind and body. For the first time in my life I found outlet for the effervescent

spirits with which nature had endowed me, and which, having fair play, left my mind at liberty to fix itself during the hours of study, upon whatever subject I had in hand, undisturbed by the vain longings for, I scarcely knew what, which had been used to come between me and my education at home.

I spent my summer vacations at Grasslands, and my Christmas holidays at Guildford; it had been so arranged before I entered on my new life. But every year seemed to widen the difference of feeling with which I welcomed those two intervals of study. At Grasslands all was gaiety and sunshine; my father generally invited one or both of the Lascelles to spend the summer with me, whilst I never returned to his house, but he had devised some new pleasure for my pursuance. Under his instruction I learned to ride on horseback, to drive four-in-hand, to shoot, to swim, to fence, to box, to exercise myself, in fact, in all the athletic sports in which a true boy delights.

At Guildford, on the contrary, each vacation seemed to increase the dullness and the gloom. They were but repetitions of the visit I paid there on the occasion of my first return from Grasslands, excepting that my mother's continued petulance of temper towards myself made me at last begin to think that she almost disliked me. I was no longer her "own Gerald," and her "dearest boy," and such sarcastic answers to my requests as, "Oh, of course, if your *father* permits you to do so!" or, "I do not suppose you would be likely to concede to any wish of *mine*," used often to rouse all my worst feelings against her, and make me inwardly vow that I would never ask her permission for anything again. Added to which, my mother still insisted upon keeping me to very strict rules whilst living with her; so strict, indeed, that as my years advanced, they were not only absurd but humiliating. She might have made my Christmas holidays as cheerful to me as were my summer ones, for I still retained a great affection for her; but she could not conquer the jealousy she felt at the knowledge that her home was no longer mine, and that I had other interests besides those which centered in the little town of Guildford. Her greatest wish was, I believe, to bind my heart firmly to herself, in spite of all counteracting influences to which I might be exposed; and with a little tact she might have found the task an easy one, instead of which, from her

want of self-control, she was destroying, inch by inch, the love which I retained for her. I remained at Eton until my sixteenth birthday was close at hand. Before that time arrived I had consulted with my father, and made up my mind as to what I intended to do. My cousin Jack had left school a year previously, and been entered as a cadet at Woolwich, and I must needs go to Woolwich too to study with him. To this my father made no objection; he wished me to have a profession, and to follow my own inclination in the matter, and if I had a preference for the Artillery, into the Artillery I should go. He knew that if ever I chose to quit the army, I should not be thrown on my own resources, and in this, as in all else, he let me have my own way. For my part, I had taken no trouble to weigh the relative advantages of serving her Majesty on horseback or on foot. I had, indeed, no preference, but I fancied that I could not be happy without my *fidus Achates*, and was only eager to follow his footsteps. I believe we shared the idea at that period of finding our happiness for life in mutual friendship, a sentiment very soon knocked out of us by a few months' mixing in the world, leaving us both well content to be only the good companions we have since remained. Fancy me then, at sixteen, emancipated from school discipline and eager to begin life; my stock-in-trade, a little useful knowledge, a large amount of ignorance, a very good opinion of myself, and a neat taste in dress.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

FIVE years had not passed away without bringing many changes to my family. My sister Beatrice had a nursery full of children, although she looked as young and as blooming as ever; and her husband had fallen into the error of taking too much port and too little exercise, and was growing burly before his time in consequence. Emmeline had married my old friend Captain Talbot, rather against her father's wishes, and gone to

Canada with him ; and Gertrude (who was the prettiest of all my sisters) had accepted the hand of her cousin Lord Lyndon, (Lord Portsdowne's eldest son,) a marriage which seemed to cement still closer my friendship with the brothers. My mother had permitted my fourth sister Lillas to engage herself to a curate at Guildford, a circumstance which had so enraged my father that he never sent for the girl to Grasslands at all ; and poor Marguerite had developed a spinal affection which threatened to keep her on the sofa for the rest of her life. So that Lady Mary had the prospect of keeping her two youngest daughters with her altogether ; and my father was, for the time being, alone. Another circumstance which had happened was the death of my grandfather, by which each of his children had received an accession to their fortune. My grandmother bore her widowhood with great serenity. The death of her husband made no palpable diminution in her yearly expenditure, for they had not lived up to their income during his lifetime : nor did it make any palpable difference to the household itself, for the old man had been a nonentity for some time past. She was surrounded perhaps by more harpies than before ; by old ladies, both widowed and single, who cherished faint hopes of eventually obtaining a small slice out of the large fortune she would still have to distribute at her own death, and grandchildren, sent to Wiversdale by their parents, with full instructions what to do and what to avoid, in order to please their grandmother ; but beyond this, that the place swarmed with fetchers and carriers, I could not see that it was altered. I often went over to the manor during my summer vacations, not from inclination, but because my father wished me to do so. For some time before I left Eton for Woolwich, Mrs Estcourt and I had come to a full understanding of the terms upon which we were likely to remain with each other. One day, when I was about fifteen, she rebuked me sharply for my behaviour towards a certain old maid, one of the harpies alluded to, and I answered, in self-defence, that I could not like her because she was such a "toady."

"What do you mean by a toady ?" snapped my grandmother.

"Well ! I mean that she toadies *you*," I replied, (I was holding a skein of worsted for her at the time, and could not fail to meet her eyes,)—"she always runs messages for you whether she is tired or not ; and unpicks your work when

you've done it wrong; and agrees in everything you say, although it may be just opposite to her own opinion."

"In fact," said my grandmother, "Miss Rose is obliging and amiable, (which I cannot say for all people,) and therefore entitled to the disrespect of a young lad like yourself."

"But she's not amiable," I replied; "she only does it for what she can get; if you didn't ask her to dinner almost every day, she'd soon leave off running messages."

This was a home-thrust, and my grandmother took it as such, or perhaps the truth had not been so rudely presented to her before; anyway she was silent for a few minutes, and then she continued—

"At all events, Master Gerald, *you* do not take such pains to please me that you run any risk of being accused of being a 'toady.'"

"I should think not," I answered bluntly; "they only do it in hopes you will leave them something when you die; and I don't want your money, and what's more, my father said I shouldn't touch it."

"Like your father's usual rudeness," said my grandmother, angrily twitching the worsted on my hands. "Neither you nor your sisters have ever behaved like my other grandchildren to me, and I need not have expected that you would. You have been brought up badly in the first instance, and your father encourages you in every act of impertinence or disobedience that you choose to perpetrate."

"I'm sure he does not," I said, firing up in my turn. "You have never cared for us, grandmamma, as you have for the others, and you never allude to my mother or sisters before me, but you have something unkind to say of them. I will not bear it, I will tell my father; I never could love you, and I never shall," and dropping the skein of worsted in the most irreverent manner off my hands, I put them in my pockets, and looked defiantly at her. Not, however, without an inward qualm, notwithstanding my fifteen years. The truth was out! What would she say to it? She took it, however, remarkably quietly.

"I know that, sir, and have known it all along, and who taught you to do so? But perhaps when you are old enough to form your own judgment, you will find there are generally two sides to a story. In the meanwhile, I beg you will go

back to Grasslands, as I can dispense with your company for the rest of to day."

I did as she desired me, and it was not until my father dragged me over almost by main force, that my pride would permit me to revisit Wiversdale ; but when I did so, I found to my surprise that things were altered rather for the better than the worse for me. Mrs Estcourt's manner indeed was as unaffectionate as before ; but she dropped a good deal of her sarcasm when alluding to my mother or sisters, which had been the cause of many a battle between us. She could not resist turning down the corners of her mouth whenever any fresh evidence of my father's indulgence of me cropped up ; or remarking every new article of dress which I put on ; or observing that I was "very independent" each time I ventured to express an opinion in her presence ; but yet she had more tolerance than heretofore. She seemed to place full reliance upon what I said, believing, I suppose, that a boy who could speak his mind so openly could not be capable of telling a falsehood. But still there was a great deal of ill-feeling between us, which appeared too strongly rooted for anything in this world to eradicate.

I left Eton in summer. I had spent the previous vacation with my mother, and fully expected to go to Grasslands as usual for the coming one ; but a few days before the school broke up, I received a curt letter from my father, directing me to go again to Guildford, and wait there until I had further directions from him. He dated from town, but gave me no reason for his wishes. His word was law, however ; for with all his indulgence, he was a man of great determination, and I knew better than to trifle with him. Bidding a last farewell, therefore, to the old place where I had spent five happy years, I took my way into Surrey, and found my mother quite as surprised to see me as I had been to receive orders to go there.

I had no reason, however, to complain of the welcome I encountered ; and after my first disappointment was over, I was glad that matters had been so arranged for me ; for poor Marguerite, although suffering no pain, was entirely laid on her back, and fretting sadly over the enforced confinement to the house, so that my advent was hailed by her as a distraction from the monotony of her existence, especially as her sister had ceased to be much of a companion to her. Lillias

(always the plainest of my mother's daughters) had become so self-important since her engagement to the curate—so far above the petty things of this world—that she considered making tippets and hoods, and other mysterious garments for the poor, out of a gray article which she termed "list," a far more important duty than striving to while away the weary hours for her sick sister; and, to my surprise, my mother upheld her in the idea. "Sitting under" the curate, too, whenever he read prayers, on Sundays or week days; looking after his schools and his poor for him; and attending all the prayer meetings, Dorcas meetings, and missionary meetings which took place in Guildford, came under the category of Lilius's new duties; and which, being novel, she performed with assiduity, leaving poor Marguerite to sigh away the sunny days upon the sofa, and to learn to think hardly of the Source whence her affliction came.

The curate himself was a fair-haired, round-faced young man, to whom I took the most unfraternal of aversions, which caused words between my mother and myself. This engagement was one after her own heart: she had strongly condemned the marriages of my elder sisters, as worldly and interested; and their conduct towards their *fiancés* as forward and unmaidenly, simply because her wishes had not been consulted in the matter. But Lilius's prospects were of her own making; and very indifferent prospects they seemed to me to be, for the curate had not sufficient money to marry on, and no chance of getting it. But then the courtship was carried on in so very delicate a style: the young people were never left alone for ten minutes together, and the conversation on the evenings when the bridegroom expectant was invited to take a mild repast of tea and bread and butter with his beloved, generally turned on the prophecies and the end of the world—according to Dr. Cumming. Having been once, however, sufficiently irreverent to speak to the curate of one of these unintoxicating festivities, by the name of "ham, jam, and sacrifice," he reported me to Lady Mary, and I was excluded thenceforth from participation in them.

I made Lilius also highly indignant by speaking of her marriage as an event never likely to come off, and asking her if the curate had ever presumed to kiss her, until she moved all her bundles of rags and "list" to an upper apartment;

and left Marguerite and myself to the undisturbed enjoyment of the drawing-room, where we spent the days in reading "Childe Harold" and "The Bride of Abydos," *sub rosa* ; and where, pity to see my lively romping sister condemned to one position, prevented my chafing, as I might have done, under my mother's continued attempts to make me forget that I had left off pinafores.

When I had been at Guildford about a week, a letter arrived for Lady Mary from my father, containing a solution of the reason for my being sent there. Since the death of my grandfather, he had set up an establishment in town, and it was his intention to make it his permanent residence.

"After Gerald has been entered at Woolwich," the letter went on to say, "it is my desire that his *home* is with myself ; therefore he will, as a consequence, spend the vacations in London. His future visits to Guildford shall be regulated by his own wishes."

Choked with tears, half of which were for rage, my mother put this communication into my hands. I saw nothing in it to call forth such an excess of emotion. I liked the idea of having my home with my father, and since he was alone, thought it was just what it ought to be ; and the way in which he wrote of my visits to my mother being regulated by my own wishes made me feel I was treated as the important personage I was. But my mother looked upon it as she would have regarded the sign-manual for my execution ; and my inability to see the matter in so grave a light only served to make her agitation greater.

"I knew how it would be," she exclaimed between her sobs, "when your father first took you from me, in that barbarous manner, and sent you to Eton. I foretold all this. I felt that he would alienate you from me, as he has done your sisters, until he raised up a complete barrier between us. Oh ! these things will be visited : they will be visited !"

I exonerated my mother, in the first pages of this history, from having striven to set her children against their father ; and during our infancy this record of her was true. But since Grasslands had shared me with Guildford, she had not always been so circumspect in her communications. She often was guilty now of innuendoes against her husband's character, which sounded ill from her lips, and occasionally she would

indulge in a little outburst like the present. But I had learnt to love my father dearly, and I was not afraid to stand up for him while absent.

"I must have gone to school, mother, anyway," I replied; "and so we should have been separated whether my father had sent me to Eton or not. You could not have kept me at home all my life, like one of the girls."

"I know that," she said, "but I could have chosen a school for you myself, Gerald: a school somewhere near here, where I could have watched over you, as only a mother can. Now you will be exposed to every evil example and temptation that a godless life can offer you, without any safeguard."

I winced at the idea of what I had escaped by being placed at a safe distance from her surveillance; but her tears distressed me, and so I strove to comfort her by alluding to the fact that I was to be allowed to visit her as often as I chose.

"And you *will* come to see me?" she exclaimed, seizing my hand, and looking up in my face as if I had been the most undutiful of sons, and a voluntary return to Guildford was the last thing I was likely to contemplate. "You *will* come sometimes to see your poor neglected mother, who is deserted by all her children, one after another. There is very little here to *tempt* you, Gerald," she continued, in a tone of complaint; "I have no horses for you to ride, or shooting to give you; but you will find no love, as you go through the world, to compare with a mother's, though you may find many who will try to make you believe otherwise."

I assured her that I knew the fact, and that no length of absence, or amount of pleasure, could make me forget it.

"Ah! perhaps you think so, Gerald," she replied, shaking her head; "but you have no idea of what you are about to encounter. Life would have been sufficiently full of danger for you, surrounded by all my watchfulness and care; but without either, and subjected to the influence of evil, what may *not* become of you?"

Her prognostications of harm, which reflected so upon my father's guardianship, nettled me, and I asked testily what evil influence she alluded to that should attack me more than others. I was a man, I affirmed, or nearly so, (as I caught my sisters' smile,) and born to fight my way through the world as men had done before me; and I supposed that I

must learn to take care of myself, as they had. But Lady Mary only sighed, and looked mysteriously towards her daughters, and said she would speak with me on the subject by and by.

The "by and by" came the evening before I left her, when she entered my room after I had retired to rest, and carefully closed the door. In her hand she held a parcel of books.

"I want you to make me a promise, Gerald, before you go," she said gravely, as she sat down on the edge of the bed. "You will doubtless be often left to spend the evenings in your father's house by yourself: it would not have been so *here*; but that question is now a futile one. Will you promise me that in such a case you will stay at home and amuse yourself with some innocent employment, instead of treading the streets of London alone?"

She looked anxiously for a reply; but I hesitated to give the desired promise: it was too much to expect from a lad of sixteen, and I tried to evade it by asking her what harm she feared would befall me from going out by myself.

"What harm?" she exclaimed, "my dear boy, you have no idea of the harm! London is a mass of pitfalls for inexperienced feet like yours; you will meet with idle and vicious companions; you will be beset by temptations to drink and gamble; and you will be lured into places, the very thought of which makes me shudder, where you will both hear and see such things as will unfit you ever after for association with the pure and innocent."

This was rather an exaggerated statement, and it defeated its end by considerably raising my anxiety to reach a place which abounded with such novel sights and sounds. For I had never been to London to stay; and thanks to my having spent my summers in the country, I was as innocent as it is possible for a boy who has passed through Eton to be. Notwithstanding my curiosity, however, to be initiated in the horrors of which my mother spoke, I told her, and I meant what I said, that I would never be induced to swear, drink, or gamble; and that, if possible, I would spend my solitary evenings beneath the shelter of my father's roof.

"And never, dear Gerald," continued my monitress earnestly, "make the promiscuous acquaintance of any one you may meet, nor take notice of what strangers may say to you.

either men or women, particularly the latter. You will see many such in London, Gerald, whom no respectable people speak to ; who are outcasts from society, and who will try to make you as bad as themselves. But, however attractive they may appear, you will promise me to shun their company, nor permit them to lead you astray."

Did she design to secure my virtue by such a warning ? If so, it was not palpable enough to serve her turn, with one of my tender years. I looked her full in the face as she stopped speaking, and without a blush (for the unconscious of evil do not blush) assured her that I would act as she desired me—that I had no wish to make the acquaintance of any one I might meet in the street, and no intention of doing so.

"I have selected these few books for you, Gerald, as a parting present, and perhaps on some of the solitary evenings I have alluded to, you may be induced to glance over them. They are not such as you will see in your father's bookcase ; that is the reason why I chose them ; you will find plenty of frivolous literature there, but nothing that will prove of service to your soul ; it is your mother alone who thinks of that. Take these then, my dear boy ; study them well : peruse them with prayer : and they will be blessed to you. And now, don't forget to read your Bible every day, and to pray as I have taught you to do."

I promised her earnestly that I would comply with her last request, and I think I may say, that notwithstanding the careless life that has since been mine, I have never entirely broken that promise. A man must be utterly hardened through whose lips a prayer never passes, even though he has forgotten to use the forms of devotion.

I was to stay a fortnight with my father before I went to Woolwich, for several preliminaries had to be gone through before I could be entered at the college. I found him living in his new house in Brook Street, which although not large (he said a small house was so much more cosy for him and me,) was handsomely furnished, and replete with every comfort. A saddle horse was kept for my use, a man to attend me, and a suite of apartments was reserved expressly for myself. I was quite awed at first by my importance, but my father soon set me at ease. "Your grandfather's death has left us very comfortable, Gerald ; and I intend in future that

we shall both live like gentlemen. This is your home remember, my boy ; and whatever you want you have but to ask for. I have only two pieces of advice to give you—don't gamble ; and if you get into any other sort of scrape, come to me."

Remembering the style in which my father had always lived at Grasslands, it was curious to hear him speak in such a strain of humility. I had yet to learn that mortal ideas and wishes are ever ready to keep pace with the wealth of him who conceives them.

I had not been in town a day before I perceived that my father was so much engaged that it was very likely the lonely evenings my mother anticipated for me would come to pass. He was dwelling now in the midst of his own friends ; reveling in literary *réunions*, parliamentary dinners, and fashionable assemblies, and had all his time fully taken up. He shut himself up in his writing-room all the mornings, a snug den at the back of the house, divided by a heavy *portière* from the front apartment ; into which only such as had business with him were admitted. His afternoons he spent at the club ; and although he was good enough to devote himself, for the first few evenings, to my amusement, his multifarious engagements were not to be put off longer. The Lyndons and Claremonts were both in town, and made me more than welcome to their houses ; but they were speeding the parting season with a succession of routs and evening parties, and I was too unused to society to find any pleasure in visiting them, except in the mornings. I was terribly shy, like most school-boys, of encountering the ogress, woman ; particularly when she appeared a noun of multitude in a low dress, and made me feel uncommonly small by her patronage. My cousin, Jack Lascelles, had already returned to Woolwich ; and on the fourth evening after my arrival in Brook Street, when I had taken my dinner in solitary state, with two pairs of eyes watching with eagerness each morsel that went down my throat, and an ominous silence pervading the dining-room which I longed at last to break, if only by a sneeze, I wished that my father had sent me there at once. I had walked a little way by myself that morning, but I had not known where to go, everything in London was so strange to me ; and I had ridden with my father in the Park in the afternoon ; still I

felt intensely dull, and realised, as I found myself alone with the polished mahogany and a couple of decanters, that there might be stupider things in creation than talking to my mother and sisters in the little drawing-room at Guildford. Thinking of my mother brought her last request into my mind, and I rose mechanically, and going upstairs, proceeded to find the parcel of books she had given me, and which still lay unopened in one of my trunks. But they were not such as she should have chosen for a boy, even had she been assured that theology possessed an interest for me; for, on investigating their contents, I found that the selection consisted of deep treatises and disquisitions on the prophecies, the book of Revelation, and the Millennium, which was her favourite study; folios of closely-printed matter which required a reference Bible side by side with them, and which were not always intelligible even with that aid. Agreeably to my promise, I tried to wade through part of one of them, but it proved too much for me, and I fell asleep over the pages, only to wake again at the entrance of coffee; after which I was sufficiently young to go to bed, and to sleep in right earnest. The following evening my father appeared before me again, dressed for visiting, and expressed his regret that I could not accompany him. "But I am chiefly engaged for dinners now, Gerald—heavy, stupid affairs, at which you would scarcely find yourself at home, were it possible to take you with me. But you amuse yourself, my boy, I hope. There are plenty of theatres open to you; and if you want money, you have only to tell me so. Or, either Beatrice or Gertrude will always be delighted to see you. What did you do last night?"

"I stayed at home, father, and read."

"Did you?—well: books are worth all the plays in the world, but boys don't generally think so. Don't mope yourself, that's all," and with a cheerful "good-night" he left me. His words were a sore temptation to me to sally forth in quest of some amusement also; and for a little while I felt as if I could not stay by myself for another evening. I took up the "Times," and read over the names of the pieces running at the various theatres, and knew that I had only to call a cab and drive to any one of them in order to enjoy myself, but my affection for my mother deterred me. It seemed so soon to

forget her parting request. When I went into my room before dinner, I found that my man had laid out my evening clothes, evidently expecting that I should require them, but I did not dress. I was trying to do what I considered my duty, but I was sulky with my duty nevertheless. So I dined in my morning attire ; and when the ceremony was concluded, I sat down to write a letter to my mother, in which I represented how very dull I felt all alone, and asked her if she ranked theatres amongst the places of which she had spoken to me. When I had finished my letter, I thought I should like to post it myself. A servant met me in the hall, and offered to do so for me ; but I knew where the post was situated, and I longed to go out for a minute and breathe the cool evening air. How pleasant it was to hear the hall door close after me as a matter of course, and to feel that if I chose I was free to go where I listed. "Cab, sir?" inquired a passing hansom, as I set my feet upon the pavement. I was sorry to be obliged to answer "No," yet a sense of superior manhood came over me as I heard the question. The cabman evidently thought it the most natural thing in the world that I should be driving about at night alone, as other men did ; and would have laughed, doubtless, at the very idea of my staying in the house because a woman had asked me to do so. I posted my letter, and was walking homeward through the maze of cabs and carriages which rolled past one after another, wondering if my mother would think it very wrong if I took a hansom, and drove about the lighted streets for an hour or so, when I was startled out of my reverie by a hearty slap on the shoulder, and looking up, found my hand grasped by that of my cousin, George Lascelles. I had not seen him for two years, as he had been travelling abroad, being destined for the diplomacy ; but I recognised him at once, notwithstanding that the most fragile of whiskers and moustaches already adorned his handsome face.

"Why, Jerry, my boy!" he exclaimed, ("Jerry" being the only name by which the brothers knew me,) "where are you off to? I was just going to your house. I came over from Paris yesterday, and heard from Lyndon this morning that you were in town. How are you, old fellow? Why, you've 'grow'd out of knowledge.'"

How glad I was to see him! I stood there, under the lamp-light, shaking his hand, and smiling delightedly in his face, until

the passers-by must have thought I had just found a long-lost brother.

"I never expected to see you, George. I did not even know that you were coming to England. I *am* so pleased. I was longing for a friend this evening. Do come back to the house and stay with me a little while ; I have so much to say to you."

"Of course I will, old chap—that's the only thing I came for. And how do you like town, Jerry ? been dissipating like fun, I suppose. You're a nice boy, you are ; how pleased your mother would be to see you. I hardly expected to find you at home ; but I suppose it's too early for you to begin your larks, eh ! you young dog ?"

So he rattled on, his arm through mine, until we reached my father's house, and stood together in the dining-room. Then I had opportunity to examine him, and see what changes time had made. None at all, or only for the better : there were the same frank blue eyes ; the same good-tempered countenance which had beamed on me on the first day I went to Eton. He was now twenty years old. What a man he appeared to green sixteen, as he stood showing all his teeth at my unaffected pleasure in the meeting. He seemed to me to know everything, and to have been everywhere. He talked of Paris, of Italy, of Vienna ; discussed operas, masked balls, and races ; and had the names of all the most celebrated people—politicians, authors, and actors—on the tip of his tongue. An hour slipped away in this style, and then George started up, and said he must go.

"Where are you bound for to-night, Jerry ?" he asked, "because we may as well travel in company. I promised to meet a friend at Evans's, but that will not take two minutes, after which I shall be at your service."

"I am not going out again this evening, thank you," I said in answer ; "I am rather interested in my book"—touching a novel of Dickens's as I spoke—"and I think I will stay at home and read."

George Lascelles burst out laughing.

"Oh, yes, Mr Jerry, *credat Judæus* ! You are a very sharp boy, aren't you ? Now, I'll be bound you are up to some mischief ; however, you can trust me, old fellow, as you know of old."

I hastened to assure him that I knew that well, but that he

was mistaken in fancying there was any need of it in the present instance. I was not joking ; I really intended to stay in for that evening.

" But why ?" he urged. " Don't you care for the theatre ? There are some first-rate pieces on now, and you cannot have seen them all. Come on, Jerry ; don't be lazy ; we'll go in half-price to the Princess's."

But still I stood out against his proposal, although it was very hard for me to do so. My pride would not permit me to tell him the reason which kept me at home ; I was so afraid that he should laugh at me, and yet I could not honestly aver that I had no inclination to attend such places as he spoke of. At last I was driven to resort to a subterfuge, and plead fatigue from walking as an excuse for my obstinacy ; after which my cousin left me, but with a laughing vow upon his tongue that it should be the last time he would accept such an apology—left me very disappointed, half ashamed of my own fortitude, and altogether disposed to feel rebellious against the authority which had imposed so hard a task upon me.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOTHING IN IT.

My father was so deeply engaged on the following day that I did not see him even at breakfast. His orders against interruption whilst in his study were so strict that I dared not disobey them ; so, as I wished to speak to him about having seen my cousin George the evening before, and had some faint idea of confiding to him my mother's warning, and asking his opinion on the subject, I sent in my name like any ordinary visitor, and took up my station in the antechamber of his writing-room until he should be at leisure to attend to me. There were only two occupants of the apartment as I entered it : one was an old man with gray hair, who sat apart, looking rather uncomfortable, with his hat in his hand ; the other, a young fellow whose face seemed familiar to me, although I

scarcely cared to recall where I had seen it, for it was a freckled face, surrounded with sandy hair, which, according to my ideas, had something repulsive in its expression. I had brought my book with me, and lay extended on the sofa, reading, utterly oblivious of my companions, until I was roused by my father himself, who lifted the heavy curtain which divided the rooms, and came forward with some proofs in his hand, which he gave to the old man with the gray hair.

"You will find those right, Mr Nelson. I believe," he said, hurriedly ; and then, as the messenger rose, and bowed himself out of the room, my father turned with a perturbed face to see who else was waiting to speak to him. I rose from the sofa.

"Well, Logan, what is it?"

He was addressing the sandy-haired young man, and as I heard his name the recollection of who he was flashed across me. It was Thomas Logan, now a clerk in some city firm, whom I had never met since the first summer I visited Grasslands. He mentioned the business he came on, which concerned his father, and mine, having quickly despatched it, was about to dismiss him, when he suddenly remembered my presence.

"You know your cousin Gerald, Logan ; don't you?"

At this I felt bound to come forward, which I did, though unwillingly ; for there was that in Thomas Logan's eye which said plainly that the old childish feud was not forgotten. He thrust forth, however, an ungloved hand, and shook mine nervously, regarding me the while with a look of suspicion.

"We have met before," he said ; "but if I remember right we were not much of friends."

"Nor are likely to be," I replied, withdrawing my hand, "since you take the trouble to remind me of it," and then, as my father was beating a retreat into his own den, I left Thomas Logan and accosted him.

"Father, can't I speak to you?"

"No, Gerald ; not now. I have every minute engaged ; after luncheon, my boy, if I should be at home," and the *portière* closed upon him as he spoke. Turning round, I found that my cousin had already left the room, and I was glad of it ; it saved me the trouble of pretending to be civil to him, when I had no inclination. At luncheon I looked for my

father in vain, and soon after I saw him drive away in the carriage.

"Mr Estcourt's orders, sir, are that should he not have returned by six o'clock, his dress clothes are to be taken to the club." Such was the only information I could extract from his personal attendant, and therefore I concluded that another solitary evening was to be my portion. I went to my sister, Lady Lyndon's, in hopes of seeing my friend George, but he was from home, and I heard was engaged out to dinner that night in company with themselves; so I drove to Beatrice's house instead, and found that they were preparing for a *soirée musicale*, at which she asked me to "look in" after my dinner. A *soirée musicale* was not much in my way, but I preferred braving the ordeal of ladies' society to spending another evening alone, so I accepted the offer and returned to Brook Street, wondering if the change would be for the better. It was something though to be able to tell my man that I was going out, and to array myself in one of those embroidered shirts and that new tailcoat of which I was so proud. I ate my dinner with a better appetite and more ease, feeling that my character for manliness was being redeemed in the servant's eyes, and sipped my port afterwards, trying to realise the sensation of a man about town, who was too *blasé* of theatres and such everyday places, to care to do more than just lounge in to his sisters' receptions when it suited his convenience to do so. Beatrice had warned the "man about town" not to make his appearance until ten o'clock, and therefore I was still engaged at this little farce when a carriage stopped at the door; I heard the familiar sound of my father's latch-key as it turned in the lock, and in another moment he entered the room hurriedly.

"Gerald, why wouldn't you go out with George Lascelles last night?"

I was so taken aback by the abruptness of the question that notwithstanding my half-formed intention of mentioning the subject to him I could only rise from my chair and look conscious under the examination of his eyes.

"I have just come from dining with your cousin at the Hautevilles," he continued, "and am on my way to Lady Mannering's *soirée*. I had no idea you had been moping at home in this manner. It is my own fault though. I should

have deputed some young fellow to take you out in the evenings and show you what is to be seen."

"It was my own wish, father," I said, unhesitatingly; "I told George so last night."

"Your own wish; nonsense!" he exclaimed. "What, have you no desire to go to the theatres and other places of amusement, Gerald?"

"Yes, of course I have," I answered; "but the fact is, father, my mother was so afraid I should get into harm, and she spoke so earnestly to me about it, the night before I came here, that I did not like to go directly against her wishes."

Although I never introduced the subject of my mother in my father's presence, unless it was necessary, I had overcome my dread of mentioning her name before him, and he had overcome in a measure his aversion to hear it.

"What did your mother want you to do?" he asked quickly.

"She asked me to promise to spend the evenings at home, unless you took me anywhere; but I could not quite do that, only I said I would try and remember her request that I should go nowhere by myself."

"So you have spent your evenings alone because your mother asked you to do so?" he said presently.

"Yes; but only for that reason, father," I replied, fearful lest he should interpret my stay-at-home qualities into a want of manliness. "Mamma felt parting with me very much, and I said that I would *try*."

"You are a good boy, Gerald," he said, kindly, "and so far, you have done right; but I am not going to have you turned into a milksop for your mother or any one else. She thought that she was right, doubtless, in the prohibition she tried to lay on you; but a woman is perfectly unable to judge in such matters, simply because she is such. Her sphere is at home; ours, in the world: in most cases she has men to lean on and to be advised by in all phases of her existence. We have to walk alone and take care of ourselves. In order to do this, we must not only begin to see the world early, but we must see it in all its lights and shadows. If we are to journey through life without stumbling, we must know where the pitfalls are; and if we would avoid being taken in, we cannot

learn too soon to imitate the sharpness of our neighbours. Your mother, like many another, would try to keep you straight by not permitting you to walk by yourself, and the first time you went alone, you'd fall. My plan is altogether a different one. I shall treat you as they do people who are learning to skate : set you up on your feet, and then you may shove along as best you can ; and if your experience comes to you after a few tumbles, they will be no more than what every one has had to encounter. George has kindly promised to call for you in the course of an hour, and I just ran in, on my way, to tell you to be ready for him."

"But I have promised to go to Beatrice to-night, father : she has a musical party, and asked me to join it."

"A musical party ' faugh ! what have you in common with Italian *bravuras* and sonatas in D, Gerald ? Ladies society will be everything to you by-and-by ; but you are too young to mix in it yet. The music will intensely bore you ; and the women will pronounce you a 'cub' at the first glance, and never look your way again. You had much better go with George, and rub some of your greenness off, before you make a fool of yourself in company."

I was not flattered by my father's remarks, and my own inclination was of course towards going with my cousin ; so after receiving my thanks for his kindness, and assurances that for the future I would be led by himself, he proceeded on his way to Lady Mannering's party.

Whether the system of my mother or of my father, for my moral education, was the right one, I leave my readers to decide : probably his reckless method of throwing me on the world only a little hastened the end which her impracticable prudence would a little have retarded : but, judging from the effects of both plans, I think, had I sons of an age to commence learning the great lesson of life, that I should adopt the happy medium.

I had not to wait long for my cousin : about ten o'clock, in he rushed, buoyant and joyous as ever, and seemingly glad to exchange the stiff formality of public society for the office of *cicerone* to even a "cub" like myself.

"That's right, old fellow," he exclaimed, as he saw I was ready to accompany him ; "I told your father I should look you up again, but I half expected to find you still intent

upon that interesting novel. Come along! night is not the time for reading, Jerry, you'll spoil your eyes."

I followed him into the hansom. How excited I felt as we rattled over the stones together!

"Going to see something of 'life' now, Jerry, eh?" said George, clapping me on the back; "going to have your first peep into the enchanted ground; your first taste of the intoxicating draught. Ah! I wish I was a young fellow like yourself, and had it all to begin over again. It's very charming when it's novel, but one does get so confoundedly tired of it in time."

He leaned back in the cab as he spoke, and languidly stroked his very passable nose, this votary of pleasure, used-up at the age of twenty. Of course his nonchalance was all assumed for my benefit; but I was young and credulous, and conceived a still greater awe for a system which could produce such marvellous effects in so short a time, and longed to commence my own career of dissipation, and become as blissfully indifferent to all things as George appeared to be. To what scenes I expected to be introduced I hardly knew; but as the cab stopped at the entrance of the first place to which my cousin took me, I almost trembled in the eagerness of my anticipation.

"Well Jerry, how have you enjoyed yourself?" said George, as, after some three or four hours of *life*, he set me down at my father's house again. I laughed, and told him "very much;" but when I asked myself the same question, I knew that I had been terribly disappointed at the result of my first dissipation. I had a bad headache from the unusual heat and noise, and from having drunk more than I was accustomed to drink; and I had not been half so amused as I had expected to be. Throughout my life I have been laughed at for affecting too fastidious a taste; but I am convinced that such was born with me. Boy as I was, the coarseness of language and gesture by which I was surrounded on that first occasion of my seeing "real life" struck me with a painful sense of disgust, a feeling which many years' mixing in such scenes has never had the power to obliterate. I have lived the life of other men frequenting the same haunts, and being brought in contact with the same

company, but I have never assimilated myself to such an existence. To this day, a blasphemous allusion from the mouth of a man, or an impure expression from the lips of a woman, makes me shudder, as I shuddered on first hearing them. Besides, I did not feel any older or more wicked than I had done before I went; and when I thought that, after all, it was more fun being a boy than a man, I doubt if my conclusion was so widely different from that of other lads on their introduction to such scenes. A dissipated life is not natural to us: it is an acquired taste, like that of smoking, and when once acquired, as difficult to break through as any of the minor vices it brings in its train. From that evening I went out regularly with my father or cousin, or by myself. The disappointment I had experienced was not strong enough to disenchant me in the pursuit of pleasure: I had heard so much of its existence, that I believed, with perseverance, I should find it, and enjoy myself as much as others did. I tried my dissipation as I did my cigar, until both, from being distasteful, became necessary to me; and the blush of conscious evil had even ceased to suffuse my face, as my mother made vain attempts to draw from me a statement of the measures I had adopted in order to carry out the plan she had recommended to me.

But meanwhile, and before the result I have alluded to was attained, I had to go to Woolwich, where my efforts to acquire a knowledge of the world were considerably aided by the laudable example, companionship, and experience of my cousin Jack. From that date, the growth of my ideas kept pace with my stature; and another couple of twelvemonths saw a considerable advance made in both. At eighteen I had passed examination for the Artillery, and was nearly six feet high: and so proud was my father of both circumstances, that he made me apply for leave to do duty at Woolwich, that he might keep his *rara avis* near himself for a little while longer.

George Lascelles had already entered upon his diplomatic appointment, and his brother Jack had been ordered to Plymouth; but we often met. The two years which succeeded my entering the army were very gay ones. I had quite overcome my diffidence to mix in the society of ladies, and was sufficiently conceited to believe that there was no

longer any fear of their styling me a "cub;" consequently, as I was exceedingly fond of dancing, I attended balls and parties nightly during the season, where, thanks to my juvenility and my harmlessness, (as far as matrimony was concerned,) the most prudent mothers were not startled to see my name down for two or three dances on the engagement-cards of their pretty daughters. I was on the most intimate terms with the family of Lord Portsdowne, being always treated as a son of the house; and naturally I figured at every entertainment given by my sisters Beatrice and Gertrude. The former was now in the zenith of her beauty, and was really a noble-looking woman, with a brilliancy of face and manner that attracted most people; the mother, likewise, of a family of children who promised in future years to rival her own charms. Gertrude, who, less handsome than Beatrice, was yet prettier, took after the Lascelles', and was fair and blue-eyed, with a character that won rather than subdued. She was gayer also than her sister, almost inclined, indeed, to be "fast;" on which subject she and I used to have fierce disputes. Like all young people who have been too strictly brought up, she scarcely knew, now that she held the reins in her own hands, when to check her frolicsome fancy; and she had no notion of being called to account for her actions by a brother of my age, so that my lectures did more harm than good; but Gertrude was too thorough to go beyond the appearance of evil. Through them I had the *entrée* to some of the best houses in London, and was always mixing in society. What was then my chagrin, in the very midst of my popularity and pleasure, to receive an order from the Horse Guards, appointing me to do duty at Freshwave.

"Freshwave!" I exclaimed petulantly to my father, when the document reached me, "where the devil is Freshwave?"

He laughed at my discomfiture. He was on the sofa at the time, with an attack of gout, to which of late years he had become subject.

"Ignoramus!" he replied; "Freshwave is in the Isle of Wight; it's time you had a little leisure, Gerald, if only to enable you to get up your geography."

"Who ever heard of the place?" I repeated. "Father,

can't you get this altered for me? I don't want to leave Woolwich just yet."

"No, Gerald," he replied seriously, "let it stand; it is much better as it is. You have had a long spell of pleasure, my boy, and a little rest will do you no harm. Besides, the season is over now, and it can make but slight difference where you are. Freshwave is a charming little seaside quarter, where you can live quietly, and have time to study, and recruit your health after the late hours you have been keeping."

"Time to cut my throat, you mean," I rejoined sulkily.

"I mean no such thing, and I trust you have too much sense to speak seriously. You know, Gerald, that, notwithstanding you have entered the army, I have not relinquished my hope and intention that you should pursue a literary career. You are too young yet to appear in print; but there is much practice required before such an end is even desirable. You have now had a few years' experience of life; turn it to account, and employ the leisure which I anticipate for you at Freshwave, in trying your hand at composition. Your first attempts will be crude; but you will soon feel your feet, and be able to tell of what you are capable. If, eventually, you should find your country quarters unbearable, I dare say we shall be able to get some other arrangement made. In the meanwhile, you had best run down to Guildford and see your mother; and try to be contented with the prospect before you."

And with this advice my father despatched me to Freshwave, and I have never quite satisfied myself that he was not the proximate cause of my being ordered there.

CHAPTER IX.

A RECOGNITION AND AN INTERVIEW.

At the time appointed I crossed to the Isle of Wight, and being landed in the very worst of humours at a little town called Starmouth, which was redolent of stale fish and beer,

found that I was four miles from Freshwave, and that a coach which met each steamboat was waiting to convey me there. It was a lovely evening in July, and the mere beauty of the ground we traversed was sufficient to cause pleasure to any one less disposed to cavil at his surroundings than I was. Trees, at every bend in the road, which met in natural arches overhead, forming avenues of shade through which the glories of the setting sun slanted, painting streaks of light on every leaf ; cottages, the roofs of which were hid by clustering roses, and the porches bowered with honeysuckle ; and hedges, the landmarks of the country, which twinkled with stars of white and pink and blue, met the eye on every side. Presently we came upon the village of Freshwave, lying embosomed in verdure, the old gray church in its midst, keeping watch like a sentinel over the morals of the parish ; but my destination was a mile and a half further on. Country-houses, enclosed in their own grounds, skirted the road for the remainder of the distance, and then was apparent a broad blue strip of sea ; a flat line of shingly beach, fronted by green downs, upon which were scattered perhaps half a dozen lodging-houses, and with a prolonged flourish on the horn, the yellow-bodied coach which had had the honour of conveying me there, drew up at the door of a long, low, ivy-covered hotel, built almost upon the beach, and my journey was accomplished. The arrival of the coach was evidently a matter of no slight interest to the aborigines of Freshwave, for the front of the hotel was immediately alive with people, eager to watch the descent of the newly-arrived passengers. I was one of the first to leave my seat on the coach-box, and as I did so I stepped back against some one. Turning to apologise, I recognised, to my astonishment, Thomas Logan.

“ Why, what the deuce are *you* doing here ? ” I said, almost forgetting my ill-humour in my surprise. He looked wonderfully confused, considering that our movements were of little consequence to one another ; grew red, stammered, and finally answered my question by putting the same to me.

“ What are you here for yourself ? ”

“ I am appointed to do duty with a detachment of the X battery, and have come to join.”

He looked still more uncomfortable when he heard this, but merely remarked, “ Oh, I was not aware of that.”

"Are you staying at this hotel?" I continued.

"Yes, I am for the present."

"How long have you been here?"

"Not long. I have a few weeks' holiday, and I thought I'd spend them by the sea."

"Queer place to choose though, isn't it? When do you move?"

"I don't know; I am not sure; I haven't decided yet." So he went on in a shuffling kind of manner, until I grew tired of speculating on his meaning, and directed my attention to my luggage. A hand touched my shoulder.

"I beg your pardon—is your name Estcourt?"

"It is."

"I am Hodson of the X battery. Come on and report yourself to Graham. We mess at seven." So taking the arm of my new friend, I sauntered away from the ivy-covered hotel, without expressing a wish to see Thomas Logan again.

I found that the detachment consisted of two subalterns, besides myself, under the command of Captain Graham. They all appeared very good fellows, and gave me as hearty a welcome as I could desire; and we spent a pleasant evening together in the billiard-room of the above-mentioned hotel, so that I retired to rest thinking that a residence at Freshwave might, after all, be bearable. But it is not possible to play billiards all day; and the duty was light, and left a wide margin of leisure for discontent.

"Confoundedly dull hole!" remarked Hodson as we lounged the next day, with our cigars in our mouths, upon the downs which rose immediately above our tiny quarters.

"Deucedly slow," echoed, with a slight variation, the other subaltern, whose name was Aynsworth. I puffed in silence, pondering on what they said. Whatever its attributes for cheerfulness, Freshwave certainly did not look much of a "hole" at the point from which we viewed it. The fort was built in a cutting of the cliff, some distance above the beach and lodging-houses; so that, from the position we occupied, we looked down upon them both. Before us lay the calm, blue, glassy water, from which, at intervals, rose sundry fantastically-shaped rocks; and all along the coast the precipitous white cliffs abruptly cut off the beach, until it was a mere fringe of shingles. Far away stretched the pathless, and ap-

parently interminable downs, broken only by patches of golden furze, whilst immediately beneath us lay the handful of stones and sand which called itself Freshwave Gate, and which looked smiling enough beneath the influence of a summer's morning, dotted over with white bathing-machines and pleasure-boats, and little children busy with their spades and buckets.

"There seem to be very few visitors here," I remarked.

"Very few," said Hodson; "there's no accommodation for them. However, the place is full now, and there are one or two very pretty girls staying at the hotel, only it's so difficult to get acquainted with them. Do you see that young lady down there, just going to enter the bathing-machine?"

I glanced in the direction he indicated, and could just distinguish the figure of a girl, in a dark cloak and hat, who was speaking to an old bathing-man on the beach.

"Yes; what of her?"

"She's the best lady swimmer I've ever met. You'll see her come out by and by, and take her 'header.' Aynsworth, have you the 'binoculars?'"

Mr Aynsworth was lying at full length on the grass, with his hat over his eyes, but he had the goodness to change his position and exert himself sufficiently to produce the articles in question. Mr Hodson immediately adapted them to his own sight.

"It's the only fun in Freshwave," he continued, "to watch the women bathe. They can't see us from this distance, you know. Now, Estcourt, here she comes. There's a 'header!' Isn't that splendid for a woman? and she will swim out a tremendous distance, too."

I am not an advocate for men watching ladies whilst they bathe; on the contrary, I have always considered the act an ungentlemanly one; but I confess I had sufficient curiosity to witness the skill of this stranger to induce me to accept the offer of Hodson as he placed the glasses in my hands. His statement was perfectly correct; the swimmer, considering her sex, was a remarkable one. Every stroke told; and she had no ungainly action of the feet, as many women display in practising the art. I watched her motions with pleasure until she turned on her back to rest herself, and then as her profile rose above the surface of the water, I started and lowered the glasses from my eyes, exclaiming—

"I've seen that girl before, Hodson ; I know her face."

"Do you?" he returned ; "I dare say you may have met her in London. She's a Miss Rivers—daughter of Colonel Rivers of the 50th—you know. They're a queer lot altogether, I believe. He has just married for the third time, and this girl is staying here with the governess and children. *Her* mother, the first wife, bolted years ago with Lord Something-or-other in the same regiment. You must remember the row there was about it, Estcourt, in the papers."

But my memory did not date back so far as ten or twelve years before—neither do I suspect did Mr Hodson's—and I was thinking, not of the antecedents of this girl's mother, but where, and under what circumstances, I had met the girl herself, and seen the face which was floating on the water.

"Miss Rivers seems quiet enough," remarked Aynsworth. "Hodson has been dodging her about, to try and make her acquaintance, but he can't manage it."

Hodson grew very red, and said that was all Aynsworth knew about it ; for, as it happened, he had never even wished to make her acquaintance, for there wouldn't be much fun in it, since the governess and children followed her wherever she went.

"Rivers—Rivers"—I could not remember the name, although the features seemed so familiar to me. But I had danced and flirted with so many girls during the two past seasons, that it was not wonderful if a few of their names escaped me. Yet the thought occupied me until the young lady had re-entered the bathing-machine, and Hodson proposed that we should adjourn to the beach, and await her appearance there.

"You'll have a good opportunity of looking at her then, Estcourt, and if you *have* met her before, she will probably recognise you." So we did as he said, and seated ourselves on a boat at a little distance from where her machine was drawn up. Three children, who were, as Hodson whispered me, her half-sisters by the second marriage, were playing about close to us, whilst the governess, Miss Hardy, a prim-looking individual with a pursed-up mouth, sat within speaking distance, affecting to be intently engaged upon her book, but glancing up every now and then from beneath her sunshade to see if our admiration of her was becoming too marked.

Presently the door of the machine was flung open, and Miss Rivers crossed the tremulous plank which divided her from the beach. Directly I saw her in her ordinary attire, even though her hair was hanging down her back, I remembered that we had danced together several times during the previous season, and instinctively I arose at her approach from the boat on which I was seated. She glanced my way, her attention directed towards me, probably by the change in my position, but no gleam of recognition came into her eyes, and she walked quietly on to the spot where her little sisters were playing, and threw herself down upon the shingles. A feeling of mortification crept over me, for my prevailing fault was vanity, and I seated myself, with a disposition to answer sharply, when Hodson whispered to me—

“I say, Estcourt, she’s forgotten all about you,” and I felt a temptation to deny that I had ever set eyes on the young lady before.

But our attention was diverted by a colloquy which commenced between Miss Rivers and the governess.

“Would it not be more prudent, Miss Rivers, to move about a little after leaving the water, instead of sitting down?” inquired Miss Hardy, in measured tones.

“I prefer sitting down,” was the careless answer.

“In my opinion it provokes a tendency to catch cold.”

“Does it?”

“And you were complaining only last evening of a slight deafness,” continued the governess. Miss Rivers, looking over the water, smiled to herself. I saw the expression, and fancied I could guess the reason she had so complained. But she only turned to one of the little girls, and said, “Georgie, run up to the hotel, and fetch me my book; I left it on the dressing-table.”

Miss Hardy rose at once.

“You must really allow me to accompany Georgina, Miss Rivers, or to fetch the volume myself. I scarcely think your papa would approve of young ladies running in and out of a public hotel by themselves.”

“Just as you like,” replied Miss Rivers.

“Have you no objection to be left alone?”

“*Alone!* why should I?” was the interrogative answer. Miss Hardy walked off, murmuring something about “so public a

place," and "the number of strangers" (with a glance at ourselves) "that one was brought in contact with;" but Miss Rivers had clasped her hands round her knees, and, still looking thoughtfully over the sea, appeared to have another attack of the deafness she had complained of the evening before. As I looked at her thus, I remembered her perfectly, and every circumstance under which we had met at the house of my sister Beatrice; even the judgment which I had then privately passed upon the young lady before me. It is universally acknowledged that to convey by pen-and-ink description a correct idea of more than the mere outline of a human form is almost an impossibility; therefore, when I have said that Miss Rivers was fair and tall, with gray eyes and brown hair, I feel tempted to say no more for fear of saying too much. Yet I will add that her features, without being heavy, had no sharpness of outline; her figure was full, yet graceful; and her eyes, though habitually filled with an expression of languor, burned with a steady light which redeemed them from all charge of sleepiness. But the most animated part of her face was her mouth, which, not too large to lack beauty, and not too small to lack sense, was constantly on the move. As I watched her looking across the channel waters, I saw the nervous lips curl and uncurl themselves, part company and press together as the various thoughts contained in a space of five minutes passed through her busy brain. Then I spoke to Hodson, hoping that she might recognise my voice, or he might use my name.

"Shall we go in for a game at pool?"

"With all my heart; come on."

She did not move a muscle, although I had spoken loudly. As we moved away, Hodson laughed in a disagreeable manner; and I felt nettled at it, heaven knows why, and resolved that Miss Rivers *should* remember and recognise me, if it were possible to make her do so. I played badly; lost a lot of money; and wrote to my father, telling him that Freshwave was the most abominable place I had ever set eyes on; and that Logan was down there, and looked such a "cad." I was ashamed to acknowledge him for a relation.

The next morning I strolled down to the beach alone, and seated myself at a little distance from the spot where sat Miss Rivers with the governess and the children. I had a rough terrier with me, and I employed myself by throwing stones

into the water for him, which he pursued for a short way into the surf, and then, losing sight of, barked at vociferously. One of the little Rivers, a child of about five years old, had a painted ball, which she was tossing about the shingles; and presently Tip seemed to imagine that the plaything was also thrown for his benefit, and seizing hold of it, brought it to me. This was a grand opportunity. I took forcible possession of the ball, and in another minute the little girl was walking timidly round me, desirous, but not courageous enough, to ask for her property.

"That's my ball, please!" she at last summoned up daring to say.

"Is it?" I replied, turning on my arm, so that Miss Rivers might have the full benefit of a personal inspection of me; "and who are you?"

"I'm Flora; and it's my ball that your little dog took."

"Flora what?"

"Flora Rivers. Please give me my ball back again."

"I will, if you will give me a kiss for it." The child advanced and put her little lips to mine, and I delivered the ball to her, just as Miss Hardy came bustling up to my side.

"*Flora!*"—in a tone of horrified propriety—"come away *directly*; how often have I forbidden you to speak to strangers!" And with a kick to the unoffending Tip, the governess conveyed Miss Flora away from my side. The dog howled, and I heard Miss Rivers' voice rising dignified and cold above the general tumult.

"I think you had better learn manners yourself, Miss Hardy, before you attempt to teach them to the children." After which there was a dead silence, and I rose and sauntered away. I had hoped this little episode would have been quite unnoticed from the fort, but I found out my mistake.

"Who's dodging Miss Rivers now, Estcourt?" exclaimed Hodson, as soon as I had rejoined them. "However, I tell you it's no good; you might as well follow the Sphinx." But I repudiated the accusation with scorn, and was more discontented with my new quarters than before.

The next day was Sunday, and as a matter of course we all went to church with the men. It was a countrified little building, with rafters in the roof, high-backed, worm-eaten pews, and whitewashed walls. It was, moreover, excessively full;

and though we, as officers of the garrison, had no difficulty in procuring seats, many of the visitors to Freshwave were standing in the aisle. Presently I observed Miss Rivers and her party being marshalled by the old pew-opener into the body of the church, where she left them, evidently not knowing where to put them. Miss Rivers looked uncomfortable, as every one does in such a position ; and without further preface I left my seat, and holding the pew-door open, motioned to her to take my place. The governess plucked at her mantle, as though to remonstrate with her on the impropriety of sitting in a pew with officers ; but disregarding the appeal, Miss Rivers accepted my offer, and with a stately bow passed with one of the children into my vacant seat, whilst I procured a sitting for myself in the gallery. This separation necessitated my waiting for my brother officers, when the service was over, in the porch of the church. They came out simultaneously with the Rivers party. As Miss Rivers saw me standing there in my uniform, with my cap in my hand, she raised her eyes to my face, and for the first time a gleam came into them which indicated she had met me before ; and with a blush which atoned for her forgetfulness, she bowed. I bowed in return, of course, and with an amount of pleasure at my success that caused me to be the unhappy butt for Hodson's jests for the rest of the day. On the next, however, my perseverance met with its reward. As I, purposely I admit, sought the beach at the same time as Miss Rivers, and Tip forced her to raise her eyes from her book by dashing unceremoniously across her lap, for which I sternly rebuked him, she bowed again. I raised my hat, and was passing on when her voice arrested me.

"Mr Estcourt, I must apologise for not having recognised you before ; but the fact is, if the truth must be told, I had quite forgotten your face."

I answered that it was of no consequence, although I did not think so ; and that I was only too honoured by her remembering me at all. But I discontinued ploughing the shingles, and went and stood by the spot where she was sitting, digging my stick as far as I could into the sand, and making it sway backwards and forwards with my weight.

"It was very ungrateful of me," she continued, though without smiling, "considering that I met you at the house of

your sister, Lady Claremont. But then one does dance with such an infinity of partners during the season that"—

Here I interrupted her, begging she would not mention the subject again. Her case, I averred, was very different to my own ; I had recognised her the moment we re-met.

"Ah ! perhaps you have not been 'out' so long as I have," she replied.

She was just eighteen and I was twenty. The supposition wounded my pride ; but I assured her that had my experience been twice as great, I could never have lost the remembrance of the evenings I had spent in her society.

"Are you devoted to dancing, then ?" said Miss Rivers.

"Under some circumstances—yes."

"I never cared for it much," she replied, "at least, I like the exercise ; but balls and parties are such unsatisfactory things. I have often said I will never attend another again."

"You could not be so *cruel*," I urged, in the absurd manner in which young men, ignorant of the sex, imagine women like to be addressed, "as to rob our ball-rooms of one of their brightest ornaments. Why, what should we do without you ?"

But I soon saw this was not the style to conciliate Miss Rivers. Her gray eyes regarded me so coolly as she answered my question, that I felt very small beneath their gaze.

"Pray, be sensible ! There are plenty of girls to take my place if I did desert you. There are women enough in the world ; more than enough, God knows !"

Her tone was so earnest and unaffected that I dropped all bantering in confusion. Was this the girl with whom, enveloped by dozens of yards of gauze, I had whirled round and round in the waltz and galop ? I could hardly believe it ! Raising my eyes to where she now sat, in that plain washing dress, simply belted round her dainty waist, a brown straw hat shading her face, I believed it still less. Remembering the sentence which had fallen with so much touching solemnity from her lips, I believed it least of all. And yet, to outward appearances, she was the same.

The silence was next broken by her asking me after the health of my sisters, and the rest of my family, and the reason of my being at Freshwave. Having satisfied her on these points, she spoke of themselves.

"Perhaps you have heard," she said with a sigh, "that my father, Colonel Rivers, has just married again. He has taken his wife to Italy for the honeymoon ; and as the house in town is being freshly painted and papered against their return, I came down here with my sisters and the governess—my half-sisters, you know ; they are not my mother's children."

I bowed to intimate that I was cognisant of the fact, although I was surprised, from what I had heard, at her mentioning the name of her mother.

"This is a pretty place," I said, "but very dull—at least, I thought it so before this morning."

"Do you think it dull?" she answered, without noticing my amendment ; "I should have called it quiet ; but no place can be dull where there is such beautiful scenery within walking distance. But I enjoy solitude."

Here the conversation dropped, and although I had been gifted by nature with a considerable portion of that sword wherewith to open the world's oyster, which the wise mother in the fairy tale asked three times for her new-born son, I had not impudence enough to intrude upon the leisure of a lady who appeared to have no more to say to me. So after a few commonplace sentences to wind up the interview gracefully, I left Miss Rivers's side, and made acquaintance with the little girls instead, who seemed delighted to gain me for a companion, and romped about the beach with Tip and myself, until we had perfectly scandalised Miss Hardy. And meanwhile, the elder sister sat with her eyes bent upon her book, not a glance or smile betokening that she was even conscious of my continued presence.

CHAPTER X.

A STRONG-MINDED WOMAN.

THE next day I greatly disgusted Hodson by refusing to accompany him to Starmouth on the coach. It was true, he averred, that there was nothing to be done there; but then, there was nothing to be done in Freshwave. Upon this, I argued that it must be six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, and it could make no difference where I spent the day. But he retorted by coarsely observing that he knew I was "going after that girl again:" and I was too young to bear such a remark with complacency, so that we nearly came to a quarrel over it. Not quite, however, for which I was glad, as Hodson, generally speaking, was a first-rate fellow. He was very hot on the subject, however, and vowed there ought to be a regulation to the effect that if officers got acquainted in a miserable hole like that with any girls worth knowing, they should either cut the concern, or introduce their brother officers to them; for it was too bad, when there were only four fellows in a place, that their plans should all be knocked on the head because one fellow chose to go "skying" after a girl at the very time that the only coach in the place started for the only other place that was worth going to. Leaving him thus spluttering and tautologous, and so offended that he would not even return my parting salute from his station on the top of the coach, I bent my steps towards the beach. It is true that my reason for not going to Starmouth was because I had hopes of gaining another interview with Miss Rivers. She interested me: I had been thinking of her all night; and she appeared so indifferent about society, that I feared, if I did not follow up my advantage, we might lapse into mere bowing acquaintances. But as far as she was concerned, I might have done as my friend desired me. There were no signs of herself, or of her sisters, on the beach, or in the bathing machines. I loitered about all the morning, cutting my best boots into strips upon the shingles, and getting more and more ill-tempered as the hours went on, and none of the Rivers' appeared.

When luncheon time arrived, a meal for which I have never entertained a fancy, I strolled up to the bar of the hotel, and called for a glass of beer.

"Is there nothing about here for a man to *do*, or to see?" I inquired in a discontented tone of the landlord, who was sunning himself in the doorway.

"Oh, yes, sir!" he replied, rubbing his hands, in mild deprecation of the slur which my question cast upon Freshwave. "Surely. Have you visited Crompton Bay, sir, or Callum Bay, or Tor Bay? all spots of the greatest interest. Parties from this hotel go there daily. Some of our ladies have gone to Crompton Bay this morning, sir."

"Indeed; which of them?" I asked, pricking up my ears.

"Miss Rivers's party, sir; they started at nine o'clock, and I don't expect them home till dinner; and Mrs Morgan's, they have gone in the opposite direction, over that way, sir," pointing with his hand to the downs, which rose above the fort.

"Where is Crompton Bay?" I asked as indifferently as I could.

"It lies straight before you, sir, as you can go. You cross the downs, by that monument which was erected to celebrate the perishing of a young man at a pic-nic by walking over the cliff, for a matter of three miles, and there you are—and it's a sweet place when you've gained it; there's no end of sea-anemones and seaweed to be gathered there, if you have any taste for such curiosities, sir."

I thanked him, and said I had; and set off in the direction he had pointed out to me. Visitors to Freshwave were free to go where they listed. Neither Miss Rivers, nor the scrupulous Hardy, could say that I was following in their footsteps if I chose to make an excursion to Crompton Bay. The walk was more wild than beautiful, since it led across the downs, alternately up hill and down hill, until a very precipitous stony decline brought me to a part of the cliff, where a rude flight of steps was cut in the earth, to enable visitors to reach the beach. At the top of these was a gate, to which I found fastened a very small donkey attached to a very large chaise, which, I concluded, belonged to the pic-nic party. Descending the cliff with a caution which was anything but unnecessary, I was nearly startled off my equilibrium when

half-way down, by a loud shout which greeted me from the bottom—

“There’s Mr Estcourt! Isn’t that jolly? Now, he’ll get them for us.” And as soon as I had touched the shingles, and taken off my hat to the ladies, I was seized by three little pairs of hands, and assailed by three little voices, all exclaiming at once—

“There are such lovely sea-anemones there, and such lots of periwinkles. Do get some for us.”

It was a lonely part of the coast on which I had alighted, with nothing apparently to entitle it to admiration, except the rough boulders which lined it, and over which the waves dashed and splashed with a free and inspiriting sound, leaving little pools of salt water behind them, which were famous for all the horrors dear to the collectors of marine curiosities. The little girls immediately enlisted me in their service to dive into these pools, and fill the tin pots and baskets which they had brought to carry home their treasures in.

“But I shall get my feet so wet, Georgie,” I remonstrated, as one of them attempted to push me amongst the boulders.

“Take off your boots and stockings, then,” said the child.

“So I will,” I answered, for the alternative had not occurred to me before.

“Georgina, what *do* you mean?” exclaimed the horrified governess. “Miss Rivers, you cannot have heard your sister’s proposal. Sir, I must beg of you to desist.”

“What is all the excitement about?” demanded Miss Rivers, who had wandered a little way from the spot. I was sitting on a boulder, with one boot off, looking very comical, I have no doubt, in my uncertainty whether I had really consented to shock the young lady as well as the governess.

“Georgie asked me to go into the water barefooted to gather her marine treasures, Miss Rivers,” I explained, ruefully, “and I thought there would be no outrage in my doing so.”

“Who says there will?” she demanded, loftily.

“I do, Miss Rivers,” replied Miss Hardy, trembling with excitement. “I never heard of such a thing before—a gentleman asked to expose his (here the governess swallowed vigorously)—his—*feet*, on a public beach, and before—ladies: I have been in many families before, and mixed in the very first society, and”—

"And so have I, Miss Hardy, and so has Mr Estcourt ; and I think we may trust him not to shock our delicacy. But as I am going to stroll a little way along the shore, perhaps you will prefer to come with me ; and we will leave Mr Estcourt to scandalise the children and the sea-gulls." So they walked away together, at which I was disappointed. I would rather Miss Rivers had put her veto on my troubling myself to please her little sisters, and given me an opportunity to walk with her instead. But we had a merry time of it amongst the boulders, nevertheless, until Flora tumbled off one of the stepping-stones into the water, and Louisa had to recall Miss Hardy to look after her. By the time that lady arrived, I had slipped on my socks and boots again ; and not waiting to hear her lamentations over the wet child, and her declarations that the accident was just what she anticipated, walked off by myself to seek Miss Rivers. I found her in a sort of cave, made by a large fissure in the cliff, from the top of which a waterfall came trickling down, running away in a continuous stream into the sea. She was thinking so deeply as she stood there, with clasped hands, gazing at the falling water that she did not hear my footstep until I was close beside her.

"I disturb your meditations, Miss Rivers ; shall I go ?

She did not start or blush ; she only said—

"Oh, no ! Flora is not hurt, is she ?"

"Not a bit ; only wetted her shoes and stockings. But what were you thinking of so profoundly when I came upon you just now ?"

"You would scarcely be interested if I were to tell you."

"But I should like to know"—

"I was thinking of the vast difference there is between men and women."

I was certainly not prepared for such an answer, and I showed my surprise in my countenance.

"I mean in the advantages they have in this world," she continued ; "I often think of it : it seems to me so unfair."

"Are you, then, an advocate for woman's 'rights ?' Miss Rivers ?"

She turned towards me quickly.

"Oh, not at all ! if you mean by 'rights' such nonsense as women having a voice in politics, or legislature, or anything which concerns ruling the nation. It is not our place, and we

could no more fill it properly than men could order a household or bring up children. I was thinking of something widely different."

"Of what then?"

"You are very pertinacious," she said, and for the first time I saw her smile, "and probably will not agree with me when you hear my opinion. I was thinking of the vast difference with which the same actions are judged in men and women. We are made by the same Hand: endowed with the same feelings, impulses, and affections: and yet the world judges us as if we were entirely separate creations."

"The laws of society do," I answered.

"The laws of society—yes! but who made those laws? Were they not laid down by men, for their own advantage and against ours? And yet they call us the weaker vessels, and profess to cherish and protect us!"

There was such an amount of contempt in her speech that she made me feel quite uncomfortable: still I ventured to remark—

"I am afraid you have no great faith in men, Miss Rivers."

"As a sex—*no*," she emphatically replied.

"And yet you cannot complain that women do not command sufficient attention in England. It is just what it should be; but there is no country where ladies are treated with such respect as in ours. You must acknowledge that from entering a room first to deciding our fate in life we leave everything in your hands."

"Oh! it is not *that*," she said impetuously, "I know men are gallant enough in matters that are of no consequence: but that has nothing to do with justice. Whenever we are opposed to you in life, we go to the wall; as long as we are content to walk in the grooves you have laid down for us, you are merciful masters; but directly we step over them to imitate the license you permit yourselves, we have both sexes down upon us at once. Now, I don't want to hear any old platitudes on the subject; we both know it is the case, and we both know it will never be altered, but *I* say it is bitterly unfair."

"But the nature of man, Miss Rivers, being so different to that of the fairer sex," I commenced; but she raised her hand.

"Did I not say that I would listen to no time-worn platitudes, Mr Estcourt? Besides, who made our natures differ-

ent? There is no controverting this fact, that men expect us to bear quietly from them what they would never bear from ourselves. But pray don't let us go further into the matter. You pressed me for the subject of my reverie, and you have it. I hear Miss Hardy making the cliffs re-echo with my name; perhaps it would be as well if we were to return to her and the children."

I followed her to where we had left the rest of the party, in silence. She had astonished me, not so much by the sentiments she had uttered as the fervour with which she had given vent to them. I had passed her over in common with dozens I had danced with, as incapable of conversing upon other than the most frivolous topics of the day; and those few sentences exchanged in the cave had transformed her in my eyes from a thoughtless girl into a thinking woman. So probably had I misjudged many before her, whose latent tastes I have never had an opportunity of unravelling.

I had fallen upon their little party in apparently the most unpremeditated manner, and therefore it seemed but natural, when they proposed making a move homewards, that I should accompany them on the road. I did, however, seize a favourable moment for saying to Miss Rivers, "Have I your permission to walk part of the way back with you?" To which request she could but answer, "Certainly, if you like to do so," though she exhibited neither pleasure nor displeasure at my evident anxiety to continue in her company. However, we had not proceeded far before an accident occurred which rendered my presence very opportune. The precipitous decline had become a precipitous ascent, in drawing the large chaise up which the little donkey broke his traces, and as the excursionists had provided no rope in case of emergencies, the expedition was obliged to halt until, with the aid of a penknife, and sundry contributions of ribbon from the ladies' dresses, I had contrived to mend the harness, and enable the donkey to start again. But luckily I broke the penknife into my finger, which excited general commiseration; for the women, however stubborn in prosperity, generally become amenable, God bless them! at the sight of a little blood; and I made the most of mine on behalf of Miss Rivers. She really turned quite pale as she bound a handkerchief tightly round my wound, which was a fleshy one, and did its duty bravely, whilst I

looked up in her face, and tried hard to make her eyes meet mine. We reached Freshwave at last, although the broken trace had delayed us considerably beyond the dinner hour.

Miss Hardy remarked upon this circumstance as we neared the hotel. I thought that my bleeding finger quite entitled me to a dinner with my fair friend, and threw out a broad hint to that effect.

"It is late, indeed," I said. "I am afraid I shall have missed my mess."

"Oh no, you won't," replied Miss Rivers, with the greatest *sang froid*, as she consulted her watch; "it wants ten minutes to seven yet. We will not detain you longer, however, Mr Estcourt, and are much obliged to you for your assistance. Good evening."

And so I was dismissed without further ceremony, though I carried away her cambric handkerchief upon my hand; and I am afraid my sentimentality made the most of that circumstance during the night which succeeded my walk to Crompton Bay. For the next few days I did not see much of Miss Rivers; but, like the parrot which could not speak, "I thought the more." I thought that she purposely avoided me; that I had permitted my admiration to be too evident; that I had done too much or too little; in fact, I thought a great deal more of her than was good for me. She puzzled while she pleased me. I had been used to have my advances anything but unfavourably received by the young ladies of my acquaintance. This I record with no particle of vanity, since it is probable that any young fellow with the same opportunities would have enjoyed the same success; would have found his compliments listened to with an appreciating smile; his soft nothings answered with the most becoming of blushes; and his powers of romancing rewarded by sundry flowers, gloves, and even variously-shaded locks of hair. But Miss Rivers, although as much a woman of the world as a girl of nineteen can be, and though it was evident that nothing that I said escaped her notice, appeared either to be *blasée* with small talk, or to hold herself above it. Even from the few interviews I had obtained, I perceived that in this instance, at least, the bird had no intention of walking up to the muzzle of the gun; and the idea alone was sufficient to inflame my ardour. The oftener she passed me with a simple bow, the

deeper I meditated on schemes for making her speak ; the less desirous she appeared for my company, the more eager I became that accident or design should again throw me in her way. At last the two combined procured me the pleasure I was longing for. In writing to my sister Beatrice I had mentioned that Miss Rivers was staying at Freshwave, and her answer contained the following sentence :—" So Ada Rivers is down at Freshwave. When you next see her give her my love, and tell her to let me know when she returns to town. I suppose she has told you that Colonel Rivers has just married again. Don't mention her own mother to her, because she ran away with Lord Edward Grieves twelve years ago, and was divorced. Papa knew the first Mrs Rivers very well, and says she was a most beautiful woman ; but that was when you were in your long clothes. I am glad you like your new quarters," &c. &c.

Without staying to remark the insult to my years which was conveyed in her last sentence, I hailed this letter from my sister. In the first place it gave me Miss Rivers's Christian name, which I had vainly tried to discover. For me thenceforth she possessed an individuality which she had not done before ; and whatever the title by which I addressed her, I was foolish enough to think of her only by those three letters ; and secondly, Beatrice's message afforded me the opportunity I had been sighing for, of calling formally upon Miss Rivers. She sat on the beach the whole forenoon ; but, contrary to my usual custom, I studiously avoided encountering her, and presented myself at the hotel as soon as luncheon-time was over. As I came in sight of it, I perceived Thomas Logan, with a cigar in his mouth, leaning against the opposite palings. The whole length of the hotel opened with glass doors upon the garden, which skirted the road ; and from the position he had assumed, I found that he could look straight into the sitting-room which was occupied by Miss Rivers and her sisters. After I had exchanged a curt salutation with him, I pointed out the fact.

" Those ladies must think that their proceedings possess a great interest for you, Logan."

" What ladies ?" he inquired.

" Miss Rivers and Miss Hardy : you are looking in directly on their private apartments."

“Do you know them?”

“Whether I do or not makes no difference. They are staying here alone, and no gentleman would annoy them by intruding on their privacy.”

“I know what a gentleman ought to do just as well as yourself,” he answered, rudely.

“Well, practise what you know then,” I replied as I moved towards the hotel door. I had no wish to have a downright quarrel with Thomas Logan, but I never came in contact with him without approaching it. He watched me as I entered the hotel, and afterwards, when admitted to Miss Rivers’s presence, I perceived that he had not altered his position, but still lounged against the palings. The luncheon-table had just been cleared: Miss Rivers was reclining in an arm-chair; she rose at my entrance, flushed but serious, to greet me. If I had thought her charming in her beach attire, how much more so she seemed to me as she stood now, disencumbered of hat or mantle to conceal the outlines of her face and figure. I had met her in ball-rooms, amidst a crowd of pretty women: her hair elaborately dressed, herself as elaborately robed; but she had never struck me then as being different to others; in fact, Ada Rivers had never appeared *beautiful* in my eyes until I saw her that afternoon in the plainest of morning dresses, and her wavy brown hair considerably tumbled, from the attitude in which she had been indulging. I believe I made a very bad business of my message: I know I stammered considerably over my reason for calling on her, and was very nearly showing her Beatrice’s letter, in proof of my sincerity, when I fortunately remembered that the whole sentence was not intended for her perusal. She helped me, however, gracefully out of my difficulty; thanked me for the trouble I had taken on her behalf (?), and said she would write to Lady Claremont herself as soon as the date was fixed for their return to London.

“I trust there is no chance of its being an early one, Miss Rivers,” I remarked, with as much anxiety as I dared throw into my voice. We were alone at the time, the children being in another room with their governess.

“It is uncertain,” she replied. “We do not expect my father home for another couple of months, and I am my own mistress until then; but whether I shall remain here or return to town must depend on circumstances.”

"I hear that you are such an excellent swimmer," I remarked, "that I should imagine you would stay at the seaside as long as you could."

"Yes, I can swim very well; not better than all women should be able to do though, if our bodies were not cramped with our minds. I learned abroad. When I lost my dear mother I was sent to school at Paris, and attended the *Ecole de Natation* there for many years. I dare say you have heard how skilful most of the Parisian ladies are in the art."

Again I was startled by her so quietly mentioning the name of her mother; but the expression which she had used concerning her seemed to intimate that she had been brought up in the idea that she was dead. Having replied to her last remark, she asked me if I had ever been in Paris.

"Only once, with my father, Miss Rivers, and for a very few weeks; but I hope when I can get leave to make a longer stay there."

"It was my home until two years ago," she said, sadly. "I know less of my father than any of his daughters." I remarked that I supposed when the bride and bridegroom returned they would have a very gay house in London.

"I do not know," she replied. "I have seen very little of my father's new wife; but she is not much older than myself, and I dare say will like gaiety. However, it will probably make little difference to me."

I did not understand her last sentence, and therefore I tried to give a turn to the conversation by asking her whether she liked London or Paris best.

"I am scarcely in a position to judge," she answered. "I have viewed Paris only with the eyes of a child, and a child likes everything; and then all my reminiscences of London are painful ones. I was sent away as soon as I lost my mother, at seven years old; and I only returned to find the house shut up for the death of the second Mrs Rivers, whom I had scarcely seen; and now my father has consoled himself for the third time; so I suppose I shall be as little wanted as before."

She gave vent to a hard laugh as she spoke, which sounded bitter from her lips; and emboldened by her apparent idea of her mother's death, I ventured to say, softly—

"My father knew your mother well, Miss Rivers."

A glow overspread her face when I mentioned the fact, and her eyes beamed upon me as she turned quickly, and exclaimed—

“Did he, Mr Estcourt ; oh ! where ?”

I was rather beyond my depth then ; but I made the most of what my sister's letter had told me.

“I am not quite certain of *when* and *where* it was that they were friends, Miss Rivers ; but I know that it was the case ; and he always speaks of your mother as having been a most beautiful woman.”

The daughter drew one or two long breaths, and then she said, with an effort—

“How I should like to know your father, Mr Estcourt.”

I was regretting I had not more to tell her ; it was so pleasant to see the look of interest conveyed in her half-opened mouth, her earnest eyes, her trembling lips ; but when the tears slowly rose into those eyes, and the under lip was cruelly taken prisoner of by the teeth above it, I could have cut out my tongue before I had mentioned her mother's name to her.

At this juncture the children burst into the room, clamorous to know if their sister would go on the beach with them ; and when they caught sight of me, if I would be one of the party. Miss Rivers brushed the tears quickly from her eyes, and asserted her willingness to do anything they desired ; and I was, of course, only too glad to follow where she went.

“Fetch me my hat and cloak, Georgie,” she said to one of the little ones, and they all three rushed pell-mell to do her bidding. As they left the room she turned towards me, hurriedly, and said, in a voice which was half entreaty and half command—

“Mr Estcourt, you will not mention my mother's name before Miss Hardy and the children, please. She is not *dead*, you know.”

The pure maiden eyes looked steadily in mine : there was no shame for her mother's disgrace in them, only a filial desire to cover that disgrace. Our looks met, and she appeared to need no other answer. She simply said, “Thank you,” and a silent compact was sealed between us for ever.

As the children returned with her hat and cloak, she put the one over her shoulders and the other on her head, without

once consulting the glass. I could not help observing this little trait ; she appeared so perfectly free from the love of admiration, or else so perfectly certain that under any circumstances she must command it. Miss Hardy joined us, and the party was complete.

"Now I am ready," said Miss Rivers, cheerfully, as she gave her hand to her youngest sister.

"And Mr Estcourt can take your other hand," exclaimed the ingenuous child.

Miss Rivers smiled. The day before she would have frowned. With the mention of her mother's name the ice between us seemed to have been broken ; with the mention of her mother's name, I fancied that she had bestowed more confidence on me than she had on many others. But that was probably due to my conceit.

"Mr Estcourt can take *your* other hand you mean, Flora," she replied ; and so we headed the procession, with the laughing child holding fast a hand of each. As we set off I saw Thomas Logan eyeing us with a sort of sullen envy depicted on his face.

"Do you know who that young man is, Mr Estcourt?" inquired Miss Rivers, as we walked away from the hotel.

"I know his name," I replied ; "it is Logan."

"He behaves so strangely," she continued, "and has done so ever since he came here : staring in at the hotel windows, and following us when we go out walking ; it is so unpleasant."

"It must be," I said, "and I will take care it is put a stop to."

"Oh, I hope you will not mention it again ; I should be sorry if it led to anything disagreeable."

"Do not be afraid, Miss Rivers : the fact is, he is a sort of connexion of mine, though, after what you tell me, I am almost ashamed to own it ; but he shall never annoy you again."

Here she apologised for having mentioned the circumstance, and begged I would think no more of it ; and to quiet her, I promised that I would not. But I registered a bad mark against Thomas Logan's name, nevertheless ; and when I parted company that day with Miss Rivers, I went direct to seek him, and found him in the billiard-room of the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

IT was about five o'clock in the afternoon, that laziest hour in summer weather, when the freshness of the morning has passed, and the cool of the evening has not yet begun—and the little billiard-room was full of men and tobacco smoke. The visitors to the hotel, as well as the few residents in Freshwave, including Graham, Hodson, and Aynsworth, had all congregated there, as they generally did at that time of the day, and I soon caught sight of Thomas Logan amongst the crowd. He was leaning against the opposite wall, watching the play, and as I had no desire to make a formal matter of my business with him, I did not immediately approach his side ; but worked my way up gradually to where he stood. Finding, however, after the exchange of a few cursory remarks relative to the game, that our conversation was not likely to attract the attention of any one but ourselves, I broached the subject which occupied my mind.

"By the way—a word with you, Logan ; you remember what I spoke to you about outside the hotel this afternoon ?"

He did not answer me ; but I saw by the expression of his eyes that he knew what I meant.

"I should be sorry to see anything unpleasant between us," I went on to say, carelessly ; "but you must oblige me by discontinuing that practice altogether, or perhaps there may be"——

"What business is it of yours ?" he asked, curtly.

"I have the lady's own authority for making it my business : she has told me how extremely disagreeable your attentions are to her, and I have promised, on my part, that she shall not be annoyed by them again. She is also aware that you are a connexion of mine ; therefore you will perceive that I have a double reason for fulfilling my promise—the consideration of her comfort, and the credit of my family."

"You have promised more than you can perform, then," replied Logan, sulkily ; "I am a free agent, and I consider that

I have just as much right to smoke my cigar against those palings as any other man."

"And to follow ladies when they go out walking also?" I said, looking him steadily in the face. "Let me catch you at it again, that's all."

He dashed down the lighted cigar from his mouth, and trod it beneath his heel.

"And pray what is Miss Rivers to you, that you stand up as the self-constituted guardian of her privacy?"

"You'll oblige me," I returned haughtily, "by not mentioning that lady in a place like this: if you wish to speak of her by name you must come outside."

"I have as much right to mention her as you have," he replied: "she is no more to one than she is to the other: I dare say you imagine that you can have everything your own way, Estcourt; but you aren't the 'head of the family' yet, remember, nor likely to be."

As the old sore thus came to the surface, I could not help smiling. The circumstance he alluded to had happened so many years before, that I had almost forgotten the details by which it was accompanied; but there was no mistaking the mingled feelings of spite and envy with which my cousin recalled my childish words.

"I am not," I replied, "nor do I see what difference it would make if I was. But whatever I may be, Logan, I have a resolute will, and by no means a woman's arm; and if you have not sufficient gentlemanly feeling to make you bend to the force of the one, I may have occasion to make you feel the force of the other. And that's what I don't want to come to, for the sake of my father and yours."

He made no reply to this; and really wishing to settle the affair amicably, I added, "Come, Logan, do not let us quarrel on the subject; you must have the sense to see there's no earthly use in following up a girl who doesn't want to know you; and it would be very unpleasant if the lady in question asked the landlord of the hotel to speak to you, which she will probably do if you continue to annoy her. So you had much best take my advice, and smoke your cigar opposite the window of somebody else. Shall we have a game together?"

The table was disengaged by this time, and I thought the offer would set matters straight between us. Logan com-

plied, though sullenly, and we left our position for the centre of the room.

"Which shall it be—billiards or pyramids?"

"Pyramids." The answer came out so bearishly, that Hodson nudged my elbow, whispering, "Who's your sulky friend?" and I had difficulty in keeping my countenance.

"You're a better player than myself, Logan, doubtless. I think you must give me a couple of balls."

"I shan't do any such thing!" he replied, in the same tone of voice; "if we play at all, we'll play even."

"All right, then—come on."

We tossed who should commence the game, and Logan won. He advanced to the table, and, after a deliberate aim, missed the lot; at which he growled, and the spectators laughed.

It was now my turn, and I played a stroke for safety. My cousin took up his cue again, and with a random stroke, evidently played under the influence of anger, scattered the balls, at which he commenced to swear violently, and placed himself at a disadvantage, for I was as cool as if nothing had happened to disturb me. I was not a first-rate player, far from it; but, as luck would have it, I took on that occasion four balls running, a feat which I had very seldom accomplished before. As the last one fell into the pocket, Thomas Logan sprang forward, and exclaimed loudly—

"That's a foul stroke."

"I'm sure it was not," I replied firmly. "Marker, what do you say?"

"It was right enough, sir," said the marker.

"He moved the ball!" continued Logan, vehemently.

I appealed to the men surrounding the table.

"You all saw me play; did I move the ball or did I not?"

"No, no, certainly not,"—"Decidedly not,"—"Never saw fairer play in my life!"—"Deuced good stroke!"—and so on, were the various judgments immediately passed in my favour. I now considered the matter settled, but Thomas Logan was of a different opinion.

"I don't care what any one of you say," he exclaimed; "I maintain that Estcourt moved the ball, and that the play was foul."

"You have the decision of twenty against one that it was not so," I replied ; " the fact is, Logan, you've lost your temper, and we had better not go on with the game."

At this he became furious, and almost insulting.

"I've seen plenty of this kind of thing," he commenced, in a blustering manner. "I don't want to come to you or any one here to teach me what's fair play and what isn't. I've been accustomed to deal with gentlemen, and I'm not going to be bullied into believing a thing against the evidence of my own eyes."

"Well, believe it or not, as you choose," I answered, angrily ; "I, for one, shall not give you another opportunity of exercising your powers of discrimination, and if I know my friends, I fancy you will play by yourself for the future." And accompanied by half-a-dozen of the principal men present, I quitted the billiard-room, leaving Mr Thomas Logan looking particularly foolish, notwithstanding his loud boasting, and a few days afterwards I found that he had disappeared from Freshwave. This I was not surprised at, as he received so cool a reception in the billiard-room after the scene which I have described, that a less sensitive person than himself would scarcely have cared to encounter it a second time. I wrote the whole account of this affair (with the exception of that part which referred to Miss Rivers) to my father, and had the satisfaction of finding, that instead of blaming, he laughed heartily at the share I had taken in the transaction.

In the meanwhile, as far as I dared, I was imitating the movements of Miss Rivers's shadow. Every morning it so fell, that, without any collusion on her part, I found myself on the beach at the same time as she did ; and on many an evening when she had wandered away from Freshwave Gate, with her little sisters and their governess, my feet appeared instinctively to take the same road ; so that it was the most natural thing in the world that we should return home through the open corn-fields or the shady lanes together.

I absolve her, at this juncture or any other, from giving me the least particle of encouragement. The blame of our meetings, if blame there was, rested entirely on my own shoulders ; for the consequences I had to thank no one but myself. She gave me many a hint to leave her, but I was

fast progressing towards that stage of interest when the broadest hint, which is intended to warn a man off a woman, is lost. I liked the morning interviews which I obtained with her better than the evening; when she would sit on the shingles, after she had left her bathing machine, engaged in reading, and I with ready assurance would throw myself on the beach beside her. I fancied I read more of her real mind at those times than at any other. It was so easy to lead the conversation to the book she held in her hand, and thence to topics connected with its subject. Our talk was always of such abstract matters; we never touched upon individualism, or if I was bold enough to approach it, I observed that she invariably changed the theme. One day, upon seeking her side, I found her sitting in her usual place, with her brows knitted, the *Times* newspaper crushed in her hand, and an expression of pain on her features, as if she was passing through some personal conflict. At first I feared that she had received bad news, and expressed a hope to the contrary.

"Oh, no!" she replied, roused from her reverie by the interruption of my presence, "I have only been reading the details of the Whitechapel murder. What a miserable world this is!"

The case she alluded to was a very painful one, at that time attracting general attention. The murderess was a poor girl, who had been driven by jealousy to kill her betrayer and her child, and attempt her own life; and as she belonged to the better class of tradespeople, the deed had excited as much interest as if it had occurred in a higher station.

"They are very shocking," I replied, "and scarcely fit reading for tender nerves; you should turn to something pleasanter, Miss Rivers."

"What a woman has *felt* I suppose a woman may read about," she answered (she was always ready to take up the cudgels in defence of her mental courage); "and only fancy what that poor creature *must* have felt; what she must have gone through before she became insane enough to take the life of her baby. I have been picturing her silent, desolate, prolonged agony to myself, until I can hardly wonder at the deed which followed it."

Her eyes had dilated with feeling as she proceeded, and her hands had tightly clasped themselves together around her knees.

"You have more sympathy with her, Miss Rivers," I said inquiringly, "in murdering the child than the father?"

"Much more," she answered quickly. "A mother must die a double death who kills her child before she kills herself."

"And yet there are women who do the one, without intending or thinking of the other."

"But not *mothers*," she replied; "they do not deserve the name; the only excuse a woman *can* have for destroying her child is when she has not the heart to leave it in this bitter world alone."

"You are soo sensitive, Miss Rivers—too imaginative: you should not permit your mind to dwell upon such horrible subjects."

"Ah! so Miss Hardy says: she considers newspapers very indelicate for ladies to read: and it is no use my reminding her that we live in an indelicate world. She only replies, 'So much the worse, my dear Miss Rivers, but a gentlewoman should keep her eyes closed.' But unfortunately I was born with mine wide open, and neither heart nor eyes will shut! Oh! what fools we women are! what *utter, utter* fools!"

There was so truthful a ring in the tone in which she said the words, the depth of conviction they carried to her was evidently so great, the sigh by which they were accompanied so genuine, that I could only wonder at this exhibition of heart in a woman who had been alternately reared in a Parisian *pensionnat* and a motherless home. No one who heard Miss Rivers thus speak could doubt for a moment that she uttered simply what she felt; for the whole of her behaviour showed how indifferent she was to the admiration of the crowd, and how little she did to attract it. Her very nonchalance, however, was drawing my feet daily deeper into the net from which I should find it so difficult to extricate them: and regardless of the incessant inquiries, jests, and insinuations from my brother officers which I was condemned to hear, I steadily pursued the same course of action, until more than a month had elapsed since I arrived at Freshwave; and every one there but myself knew that I was at the feet of Ada Rivers. My own eyes were opened to the fact in a very sudden manner. I suppose the day of reckoning in such cases usually falls abruptly: we come down to dinner, think-

ing Miss Jones a very charming young lady, as we have thought for weeks beforehand ; but she chooses on this occasion to turn her attention from ourselves and fix it upon Smith ; and in a moment the pang of jealousy we feel reveals to us, while it draws all taste out of the *salmi* on our plate, that Miss Jones is the particular woman we desire to secure altogether for ourselves. I had no rival with Miss Rivers through jealousy of whom to read my own heart, and the feeling by which I discovered that she possessed more than an ordinary interest for me was that of fear. One evening we were on the downs together. I had seen her set off from the fort, and having nearly choked myself in my efforts to swallow my dinner, hastened to join her. For a wonder, she was alone ; a most unusual circumstance since I had taken upon myself to dog her footsteps, and one which I hailed with delight. The short, soft turf of the downs prevented Miss Rivers hearing that she was followed, and I was close behind her without her being aware of my vicinity. She was strolling slowly along the cliff, which was perfectly unprotected and frightfully precipitous ; and as I gained upon her, I observed to my horror that, wrapt in thought, she walked from one side to the other, and that at each turn she went nearer and nearer to the edge. The idea that she might fall over and be dashed to pieces on the beach beneath, suddenly struck me ; a picture of her fair body, crushed and mutilated on the cruel shingles, rose up in my imagination, and froze my blood, and as her figure commenced again to sway towards the point of danger, I rushed forward, and at the risk of falling over myself, sprang between her and the outer edge. My feet were just planted in the crumbling soil, and with an effort to save myself, I extended my arms towards her, gave her a push on to the downs, and then followed and stared at her. Her face had flushed with surprise, whilst mine I felt was as pale as ashes.

“Mr Estcourt !” she exclaimed, as if she thought I was drunk or mad.

At first I could not speak to her : I drew my breath hardly for a few moments, and then I said, panting--

“I thought you were going over the cliff !”

When the reaction had set in, I trembled all over ; and the deep fear and anxiety I had felt must have been depicted on my countenance. Something else, which I felt still, was de-

picting itself on my heart. I knew that I loved her. I knew that if Ada Rivers had gone over that precipice, I should have gone after her, although certain death awaited me at the bottom. But she saw nothing of this.

"Was there any danger?" she asked quietly.

I had partly recovered myself by that time, and I explained to her how great the danger had been, and how much nearer she had walked to the edge than she had imagined. I led her there again, and bade her look over the cliff, at the frightful depth beneath it, until she shuddered and drew back, and made more of the service I had rendered her than it really was worth. And we walked home through the silent evening together; and although our conversation was on the most ordinary topics, there was a continual song kept up in my heart, the notes of which rose above even the music of her voice, and told me that I loved her.

When I went to bed that night, I conned over earnestly the new knowledge which I had attained, in order to arrive at some resolution with respect to my future actions. Although I was young, I was no boy except in years; and I had not thought long before I decided, that whether she loved me or not in return, I should tell Ada Rivers of my discovery. I felt that without it I could no more mix in her society with the same freedom as heretofore: added to which, she might leave Freshwave shortly, and I had not the "faint heart" which would lose a "fair lady" for want of asking. If she accepted me, of course marriage would be the result. Here I hesitated, not being quite sure how my father would receive the proposal of my "settling" at twenty years of age; but came to the conclusion, a moment afterwards, that whether he liked it or no, I should be my own master in another year; and Ada Rivers would doubtless wait for me. If I had not sufficient bashfulness in prosecuting my first suit, I had plenty of energy: and I have made it a point through life to let the women decide which they like best in a lover. It is a matter which so purely concerns themselves alone. Having arrived at this decision, however, I was compelled to wait for a favourable moment in which to tell my tale; for I was too romantic to make a formal declaration of my attachment, and trusted much to time, place, and opportunity, to insure me the flattering answer I hoped for. I looked upon women in those days

as very weak creatures, compared to myself, and had great faith in their being coaxed or cajoled into changing even an expressed opinion ; had faith also in the supposition that the mere fact of their knowing that a man entertained a passion for them, was sufficient to make them look with a kindly eye upon him. So I followed Ada Rivers about wherever she went, in hopes of finding her once more alone ; looking on her almost as mine already—or to be mine as soon as the magic words were spoken between us. Her sisters, however, or the governess were always in the way, until I began to hate the very sight of them. At last, however, I imagined I had gained the opportunity I sought. A few evenings after the adventure on the cliff, I was lying on the downs above the fort smoking a cigar before mess, and dreaming of my love, when the sound of children's voices in distress reached me from below. Immediately beneath the cliff at that part was a large cave, which at low water was accessible from the beach, and which was divided into several chambers. The tide was now setting in, though slowly, and I guessed directly that some little people, probably fishermen's children, had been taken prisoners there, and would not be released without a good wetting. But in another minute the voices had risen louder, and I recognised those of Flora and Georgie and Louie Rivers.

"What *shall* we do, Georgie? it's right above my stockings ; she'll be *so* angry."

"Oh ! I wish somebody was here to carry us over it : I shall have another page of 'Guide to Knowledge' to-morrow ; she said I should if I wetted my new boots."

"Can't we go now, Louie ? the waves have gone back a little."

"Let's try—make haste—no ! here it comes again ; and such a big one ! Oh ! Georgie, we shall be drowned. Do call out loud, so that Ada may hear us."

I felt no doubt now of what children were in the predicament alluded to, and running down to the beach, I stepped across to the cave, and carried the three little miscreants to dry land again, where they were all gratitude for the trouble I had taken.

Miss Hardy had gone into Starmouth by the coach to buy them some new copybooks, and Ada had a headache, and so they had been allowed to play on the beach by themselves ; and had found such lots of periwinkles in the cave, and it had

been such fun, jumping from one big stone to another, that they had forgotten all about the tide, until they thought it was time to go home. And they were so much obliged to me, and would I kiss them all round, before Miss Hardy came back, and please what o'clock was it, and had the coach returned from Starmouth?

The mess bugle had sounded some little time before, but I could not resist the temptation of taking the children back to their sister. She was sitting in the room with the cloth laid for dinner, looking a little pale perhaps for her headache, but none the less attractive in my eyes; and she was almost as full of thanks as the children themselves for what I had done for them.

"You have saved them probably from a day's punishment, Mr Estcourt; for they are most judiciously brought up, and receive as severe a reprimand for wetting their feet as they would for telling a falsehood. I am sure they ought to be greatly obliged to you, for I expect Miss Hardy back every minute."

And indeed as she spoke the horn sounded, and the wheels of the approaching coach were to be distinctly heard.

"And Mr Estcourt has missed his dinner, too," put in Georgie, "for I heard the second bugle when we were in the cave."

Grown wiser by experience, I said that it was no matter, and that I should be in time for as much dinner as I cared to have. But Miss Rivers asked me if I would stay to theirs.

"If you can put up with a family dinner, Mr Estcourt, we shall be very pleased to see you."

Of course I said, and I meant what I said, that any dinner would be acceptable to me at which I had the pleasure of her society. In another minute, Miss Hardy was in the room, with a pile of copybooks under her arm, not looking particularly gracious at finding an addition to the party.

"And are we not to have dinner, my dear Miss Rivers?" she inquired, pathetically, after she had detailed the interesting particulars of her journey to Starmouth.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Mr Estcourt stays with us this evening;" and the bell which the governess rang after the announcement was pulled so violently that it sounded as sharp as her own voice. Considering, I suppose, that increased danger called for increased care, she was especially vigilant over

her unhappy little pupils during the meal which followed ; and snapped them up so quickly at the least solecism of good manners, that they were almost afraid to ask for as much as they wanted. Dinner ended, she marched her trio to another room to undergo some mental exercises before they went to bed. It was now eight o'clock ; the sun had long gone down, but the August night was close and oppressive, and the little room felt still more so.

"How pleasant and cool it is out here," exclaimed Miss Rivers, stepping from the open glass doors into the hotel garden. "I have had such a wretched headache from the heat all day ; the air is quite refreshing to me."

I followed her of course. The garden of the hotel was merely a belt of grass, intersected with gravel paths, for it was too near the sea to permit any flowers to flourish there. At the end was planted a low hedge, beyond which lay the shingles, and the broad smooth sheet of water looking like colourless glass beneath the twilight.

"How calm the sea is !" said Miss Rivers, as she stood by the low hedge, and I stood beside her. "Will it not look beautiful when the moon rises ? Have you seen the natural arch by moonlight, Mr Estcourt ?"

I had not ; which was the less surprising as the day had generally dawned before I found my way back from the stifling little billiard-room, reeking with gas and bad air, to my quiet quarters at the fort.

"It looks so lovely," she continued. "I stayed up one night on purpose to go and see it, and I walked down there at twelve o'clock all by myself. Miss Hardy was horrified ; but she would not go with me, and I met no one. It was well worth the trouble."

"I should like to have seen it," I replied, mechanically. I was gazing at her form as she stood there in the fast-increasing dusk, and thinking whether I should take her in my arms and tell her that I loved her.

"Well, it is to be seen any night, you know, only you should go when there is a full moon. You can have no idea of the effect. The moonlight makes the irregular surface of the rocks shine like crystals, and the waves—Ah !"

Unable to restrain myself any longer, I had put my arm around her waist. It was a modest, faltering touch, notwith-

standing my boasted courage ; but she shook herself free of it at once.

“ Mr Estcourt, you forget yourself ! ”

“ Ada, don’t be angry with me ; you must know, you must have seen how I love you. I have been waiting for days for an opportunity to tell you so ; only put me out of my suspense at once, and let me know my fate.”

“ Your fate ! ” she repeated, as if she scarcely understood my meaning : and as we looked at each other, I could see, notwithstanding the twilight, that her face had grown deadly pale. “ Mr Estcourt, tell me, have I done anything to warrant your putting it in my hands ? ”

“ No ! no ! ” I said passionately, “ a thousand times No ; only, for God’s sake, relieve my anxiety, and say if you love me in return.”

She turned her face away from me.

“ Oh ! I wish I had never come here ! I wish we had never met ! ” and then, as with a sudden resolve—“ Mr Estcourt, it is not my fault, but I am *engaged to be married* ! ”

If she had cast a thunderbolt at my feet, she could not have surprised or disappointed me more. I could not speak to her again ; I left her side, and with vehement steps strode from the little garden. I heard her voice call my name twice, but I would not stop to listen to her words ; I went straight to my own room in the barracks, locked the door, threw myself on the bed, and indulged my first grief to the utmost.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW GERALD’S FIRST LOVE CAME TO AN END.

I WAS bitterly disappointed ; I hardly knew how bitterly until I came to commune with my own heart : to remember that it was all over : that I had put the question which had been hovering on my lips for so many days, and received the answer ; that I had thrown the dice and they had turned up aces. Not, that with all my assurance I had been conceited

enough never to imagine a reverse side to the picture ; on the contrary, I had often thought on my possible defeat ; but I had not dreamed of its coming to me in this particular form, and felt aggrieved to be vanquished in any but my own way. I had fancied Miss Rivers objecting to my suit on various scores ; because we knew too little of each other, or that, as yet, she felt nothing but friendship for me, or that she feared the opposition of her father to the engagement : but on none which should not prove a fresh impetus to me to make the citadel surrender by force. Under such circumstances, however disheartened, I should still have retained hope, and taken comfort in the thought that time, or perseverance, or a resolute will, must eventually accomplish my object. But the news which I had received in the hotel garden left me no grounds for anything but the attempt to sweep her image from my heart at once and for ever. At first I was disposed to blame her that she had left me so long in ignorance of the fact of her engagement ; but the thought was too ungenerous even for a rejected lover to harbour. I knew that she was entirely innocent of leading me into the error of supposing that she was free : that never by word or look had she hinted that my attentions were agreeable to her ; that we were not even sufficiently intimate to justify my expecting to have been enlightened regarding her private affairs ; and that whenever we approached the subject of herself, she had, as I have said before, studiously turned the conversation. She had behaved to me consistently throughout the term of our acquaintance ; she had been always courteous, but modest ; friendly, but reserved ; and I could not deny that from the first I had known there was a line drawn between us, over which a more daring man than myself would scarcely have presumed to venture. I was thus perfectly aware that my disappointment was due to my own folly, and that I fully deserved it for having been so rash as to disclose my love to Miss Rivers, without having ascertained, by however slight a sign, that she knew of my attachment, and did not disapprove of it. But the pain we inflict on ourselves is no easier to bear than that which comes from the malice of others ; in fact, it is harder, since we are deprived of even the consolation of reviling our enemies. It appeared to me on looking back, that notwithstanding I had admitted the possibility of a refusal

from her, my mind had far oftener dwelt on the happiness I should feel when she accepted me. In fancy I had seen her fair face glowing at the announcement of my love ; her eyes beaming with reciprocal affection ; had felt the fluttering of her heart pressed against mine ; the trembling of the hand I held in my own. I had anticipated such a scene, and felt it would be the acme of pleasure for me ; now, as I recalled my fancies, and knew that they could never be fulfilled ; that the dream was over, and all that remained for me to do was to forget it, I ground my teeth together, and would have risked my salvation to obtain what in my boastful folly I had so lightly dreamt of. For I never knew how much I loved Ada Rivers until I heard that I had no right to do so ; that all the time I had been following her about in public, and sighing after her in private, her thoughts and heart had been occupied with the image of the absent ; that it was of no use my attempting to gain her favour or to change her opinions, because she was already pledged to become the wife of another man. That night was one of the most miserable I have ever passed. Let no one decry the suffering of the young because they are young. As we grow older we get used to pain, both mental and physical. I was all unused to both ; and the first agony I endured was in proportion to my strength. It was no flesh wound, for it left its mark for many a day afterwards. My love for Ada Rivers was my tide ; but I missed it in the flood. Had it so happened that she had been free to return my affection, the whole current of my life would probably have been changed. I should have glided from a loyal engagement into a loyal marriage, and temptations which have been my curse would have lost their power over me. As it was, I trust that such as read my history, whilst they shake their heads over the follies with which my existence has been crowded, will remember the disappointment which sunk so deeply into my heart ; sunk like a stone to the very bottom, and there remained a heavy weight, unknown to all but myself.

One night was all the holiday which I allowed my sorrow ; with the morning's light I was up again, to my brother officers apparently the same as ever ; but I carefully avoided leaving the vicinity of the fort, and pleaded the unusual heat as an excuse for indolence. In the afternoon Hodson came up from the billiard-room brimful of news.

"I say, Estcourt, do you know that your friends the Rivers' are off to-day?"

The mention of her name, and the sudden intelligence of her departure, made my heart leap; but I replied steadily that I had been told some time before that they were likely to leave.

"Well, the place *is* getting confoundedly hot: it's the same all over the Isle of Wight; I wish to goodness we were out of it. I suppose you'll be running to the hotel; they are putting the luggage on the fly now."

"No, I think not. I dined with them last night, and made my *adieux* then; and the weather is really too warm for any unnecessary gallantry."

"Lazy dog," laughed Hodson. "I wish I'd your chance of being polite; I'd accompany her to Starmouth, and see her off by the boat. There won't be a woman worth looking at in Freshwave when she's gone."

I fully acquiesced in his opinion; but I had not the courage to go and say good-bye to her. She had no wish to meet me again, or why this sudden departure? She intended me, doubtless, to take it as a hint to that effect, and she would find her desire was respected. Notwithstanding, I took my glasses up to the heights, and watched the carriages as they moved off from the hotel. There appeared no limit to the luggage; it was evidently a final move, and this was the final look I was about to give her. I could discern her figure plainly as she stepped into the vehicle: it appeared just the same as usual; but as the fly moved off, she turned her face towards the fort and full upon my glasses. For a moment there flashed upon me a pair of serious, anxious-looking eyes, and then she was gone, and I had seen the last of her. I turned my face round upon the thyme-scented grass, and thought of her own words, "What a miserable world this is!"

I passed through the next few days in much the same manner as one does through those which immediately succeed a funeral. I ate my meals, performed my duty, appeared at the billiard-table, and rose and went to bed as I had done before; but I felt so little interest in anything that I began to think that to all intents and purposes life was over for me. On the fourth day, however, the reception of a letter in Miss

Rivers's handwriting caused a complete revolution to take place in my feelings. I had never seen her writing before ; but directly I took the envelope in my hands, I felt instinctively that it had come from hers, and mine shook so violently that I could scarcely open it. The letter was written upon foreign paper, at the top of which was printed a scroll with the motto, "*Aide toi ; le ciel t'aidera*," and as I read I felt that she had selected it for my especial benefit. She dated from Ryde, and wrote as follows :—

"MY DEAR MR ESTCOURT,—

"I hardly know if I am wise in writing to you ; but I am sure that you will not misinterpret my reason for doing so, and I have so great a desire to tell you, what you would not wait the other evening to hear, that I feel as honoured by your preference as if I had been at liberty to consider your proposal. I trust you absolve me from all blame in the matter, and will believe me when I say that had I entertained the least idea in what our unfortunate acquaintance would have resulted, I would have left Freshwave long ago ; but your revelation took me completely by surprise. I hope I have your forgiveness for any pain I have thus unintentionally caused you, and that it may prove as short-lived as the pleasure. If you will not be offended at my presuming to offer you advice on the subject, mine is that you turn your mind for the next few months to some active employment. I do not think so lightly of what you told me as to imagine you will all at once forget your disappointment ; but the sooner you conquer your feelings for me, the sooner I shall pardon myself for having been the cause of them.

"Please don't answer this letter ; it will be best for both of us.

"Believe me, your sincere friend,

"ADA RIVERS."

The perusal of this note threw me into a transport of hope and happiness. I fancied I could read love for myself, disguised beneath the words of pity, and the expression "*it will be best for both of us*," led me into the mistake of imagining that Ada Rivers feared for her own peace of mind as well as for mine. Thereupon I determined to disregard her wishes,

and to answer her letter : it was a selfish resolution, but men in love are not usually remarkable for the opposite feeling. I composed a passionate epistle, the details of which I have forgotten ; but which, doubtless, contained more folly than I should care to write down here. I remember that in it I poured out my whole heart before her ; that I declared my love to be stronger and more capable of making her happiness than the love of any other man could be ; and expressed my readiness, if she but acquiesced, to fight for her possession against the whole world. A fiery, boyish epistle, of the composition of which I might now be ashamed ; but dictated by feelings so fresh and ardent that a careworn man of the world would give his right hand to be able to feel them again. I sent my letter to Ryde as soon as it was finished, and waited anxiously for a reply, but none came. Day after day I lay in wait for the postman on his road from Starmouth, but he never brought me an answer from Miss Rivers, until I grew sick with disappointment, and cursed my lot, and was almost ready to curse her, and all women for her sake. I can see now how mad I was to send that letter, how more than mad to expect her to reply to it ; but then I was young and inexperienced and unreasonable ; and not having been able to take her communication in the kindly, unaffected spirit it was written, grew incensed with her for not making a bad matter worse by opening a correspondence with me. I had almost fretted myself ill with my fruitless longing and expectation, when a letter from my father suddenly took me to town. Two circumstances had occurred to call for my presence there : one of which was a violent attack of gout on his own part ; the other, the return of my sister Emmeline and her husband from Canada. It was the best thing that could have happened to me : in a moment I had shaken off the apathy and discontent which were beginning to be my masters, and was all eagerness to rejoin my family ; and having procured, without any difficulty, a week's leave of absence, I left Freshwave, and thought, as I lost sight of the quiet little place, that a week of pleasure in town would be certain to act as a restorative to my usual cheerfulness. The idea was a natural sequence to the first excitement consequent on an unpremeditated change of scene and action. I had not lived much longer before I learned that a real heart-wound may be salved over, but is not to be healed in so many

days, months, or even years. The same evening I was in Brook Street. I found my father really ill, and looking more so than I had ever seen him. He had been kept to the house with gout for upwards of three weeks, and the confinement, to a man of his active habits, was almost worse to bear than the pain. He had sunk into low spirits during the last few days, and had several times expressed a wish that I had never left Woolwich, until his daughter had begged him to write for me. The unexpected arrival of Emmeline and her husband (who was now Colonel Talbot) had decided him to take their advice, and so we four (whom my father was used to call *his* children) were once more reunited. Emmeline we all thought much changed. Her Canadian life did not appear to have agreed with her, for she was thin and pale, and a great contrast to her blooming sisters ; but she had the same sweet smile as ever, and glided so quietly into her place as her father's nurse and companion that one might have thought she had never left it. My old friend and brother-in-law, Colonel Talbot, with the exception of a few gray hairs, looked as well as ever ; but he stared with amazement when I entered the room, as if he had expected to see me the same size as I had been when he left England. Their family consisted of only one child, a daughter, five years old, of whom they appeared inordinately fond, which called down much matronly advice from Beatrice.

"Ah ! it's all very well for you, my dear," Emmeline would say, in extenuation of her idolatry of little Ethel ; "when I have ten children, perhaps I shall not have so much love to bestow on one ;" and poor Beatrice, who had really been guilty of eight babies, would half laugh and wholly blush, and declare it was very unfair to take to enumeration.

"By-the-by, Gerald, did you ever give my message to Miss Rivers ?" she exclaimed one evening, as we were all assembled round the dinner-table in Brook Street.

I felt that I coloured as she put the question to me, but I answered in the affirmative, and no one appeared to perceive my discomfort.

"Have they left Freshwave ?"

"Yes ; some little while ago."

"Where are they now ?"

Here I must confess that I told a downright falsehood, and said I had no idea.

"Oh, well, I suppose Colonel and Mrs Rivers will be back in town shortly, and then their daughters will join them. She's a pretty girl, isn't she?"

"Which one?" I spoke as innocently as I could, tossing off a glass of wine as I spoke.

"Which one? why Ada, of course: the others are all children in the schoolroom. You must have met Ada at my house last season, Gerald."

"I believe I did; but I do not make a library of my engagement cards, and so the name had escaped me, until I heard it again. *En passant*, what has become of the lovely Miss Harris, with whom I danced so often this year?"

"Oh! Lucy Harris. I believe she's gone for a tour in Germany. Yes, she is a *very* pretty girl. I can assure you, Emmy, Gerald was constant to her this season for a whole fortnight; I really thought it was going to be a case. He danced with nobody else when he could dance with her; called at my house twice a-week in hopes of meeting her; and lost his appetite completely for dinner one day, when he had just come from Mrs Holmes's kettle-drum, where he had been discussing coffee and ices and Italian confectionery all the afternoon."

My sisters laughed heartily at this description of the fatal effect love had had upon me; whilst I declared it was too bad of Beatrice to lay my heart bare in that fashion, and my father said he hoped it would be the only kind of love-making that I should indulge in for some time to come.

"Gerald is a great deal too young to think of anything serious yet: I have no faith in the happiness of early marriages, usually the results of an immatured choice. In my opinion, a man should see all kinds of women before he decides upon one, and the only way he can see them is to flirt with them. Depend upon it, Gerald will never choose for a wife, at thirty, the girl he has madly admired at twenty."

I differed from my father here, of course; but equally, of course, I was silent, and he went on—

"Now! there was the mother of the girl you mentioned a short time ago, Colonel Rivers's first wife: she was a beautiful woman; fair as any Saxon, with hair and eyes as dark as an Italian's; her daughter can't hold a candle to her. I was desperately gone about her before she married Rivers; ay, and

for the matter of that, so was some one else, not distantly related to me. However, she would have nothing to say to either of us, and she hadn't been married seven years before she eloped with that scoundrel, Grieves, and there was an end of her; and don't you think I was devilish thankful, when I heard it, that she had refused to do me the honour to become my wife? Depend on it, a man under thirty is not capable of judging what he likes, and what he doesn't like: we begin by thinking women are the softest, easiest books possible to read, and we end by knowing they are the most confoundedly hard riddles a man ever set himself to unravel."

Here my father pushed his wine glass impatiently from him, for he was able to have his chair wheeled up to the dinner-table, and looked disgusted with the recollections his theme had evoked. I could not perceive in what way the results of his own matured choice carried out his theory; but I remarked that perhaps had Mrs Rivers become Mrs Estcourt she might never have run away at all.

"Oh, yes, she would," he answered decidedly, "that is, if Grieves had come across her; for he was the most fascinating man of his day, and used to boast that no woman could withstand him. Fine fellow, Grieves."

"I thought you called him a 'scoundrel' just now, papa!" observed Beatrice.

"Well! so he was, my dear," said the moralist, rather confused, "as far as carrying off poor Mrs Rivers was concerned; for she was an uncommonly pretty woman; but still, we must give the devil his due, you know."

"I'm afraid if Lord Edward Grieves only got what I should consider his due," replied my sister, "that his allowance would be small. I met him once at a dinner party, and I thought him a horrid-looking old man; greedy, selfish, and affected; and cannot imagine his ever having been fascinating."

"Does Mrs Rivers live with him still?" I asked, appealing to my father.

"I should imagine not; but I know nothing about it: I am not even aware if she is alive: it all happened so many years ago. But the girl can't hold a candle to her mother; not a candle."

So, I had little doubt, had many a man argued with reference to the mother herself. We are so apt to think that

nothing is so good as it was when we were young : so hard to convince that it is our own aptitude for appreciation that has dulled, and not the articles we are called upon to value.

I spent my week in town, and then I returned to my duty. It had been a week of excitement, but not of happiness ; on the whole, however, I had enjoyed myself. I left my father better, and the Talbots settled down in Brook Street to keep him company : so that I was quite easy on his account. The first question I put to my servant on my return to Freshwave, was relative to my letters. Several had arrived during my absence, but none from Ryde. A deep, dull feeling seemed again to settle on my spirits, and I was forced to acknowledge to myself that I had been fool enough to cherish expectation in spite of my experience. The fear, however, of my brother officers perceiving my dejection, and guessing the cause, aided me in throwing it off. I had not destroyed the letter I had received from Miss Rivers ; in default of another, I returned to it for comfort. The little diversion consequent on my journey to town had done me service : I was enabled now to read it with different eyes, and to see how futile had been my hopes, after the reception of such a letter, of beguiling her into substituting a reciprocity of love for pity for the distress she had caused me.

I pondered long on the advice which she had given ; it tallied with my father's injunctions to me on leaving him for Freshwave, and which he had renewed during my last visit. I determined that I would follow her counsel and his, and seek active employment for my mind, which I could do only by attempting literary labour. I was forbidden to write to her ; I would tell her all my thoughts and hopes and aspirations : she should see how I regarded her—in print.

Once seized with this idea, I soon went to work. I pictured to myself, not scenes which had, but which might have been, had fate not interposed between herself and me. I drew a woman, not Miss Rivers, but something like her ; and a man, not Gerald Estcourt, but something like him, and put all her beauties on my heroine's head, and all my passion in my hero's mouth ; and doing this, the place and time, and mode of action, followed naturally. I wrote from the bottom of my heart : freshly, sincerely, and unaffectedly ; and my

tale, with all its faults, was consequently true to nature, and grew with rapidity. I had commenced it with a view to its completion in a few chapters ; but before I knew where I was, it had refused to be finished under three volumes. The work was good for me ; it occupied my thoughts even when I was not engaged upon it, and prevented my dwelling upon my disappointment ; and gradually, the morbid feelings which I had not only possessed, but nurtured for some time after the termination of my unfortunate attachment, disappeared : a healthier tone of mind set in ; and if not as lighthearted as I had been before I saw Miss Rivers, I was at least myself again. I was terribly thrown back at one period of my convalescence by an announcement to the following effect, which appeared in the daily papers :—

“ On the 15th inst., at the Church of St George’s, Hanover Square, by the Rev. —, assisted by the Rev. —, Saville Penryhn, Esq., son of the late Saville Penryhn, Esq., of Mostyn, in the county of Glamorganshire, to Ada, eldest daughter of Colonel Frederick Rivers, of H.M. 50th Regiment of Royal Buffs.”

Before I read that announcement I had thought that my transient dream could not be ended more effectually than it was ; but, the final shock over, I staggered to my feet again and went on my way steadily. The name of Ada Rivers could never again disturb me ; there was no such person now—she was Ada Penryhn. I turned to my literary work with more zest than before,—ostensibly, because I reasoned with myself that occupation was necessary for me ; really, because I took a melancholy delight in lingering over the pages which teemed with traits of the character which had unfolded itself to me in the sequestered spot I wrote from. I believe I was as cheerful a companion during that time, as ready to engage in any fun, or to laugh at any jest, as I had ever been ; and, if I was not heart-whole, it is certain that I showed no outward signs of my complaint. In the meanwhile, with the occasional distraction of a flying visit to London, nearly twelve months had slipped away since I first arrived in Fresh-wave, when a great and startling change was made in my prospects.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW AUTHOR.

I WAS fast nearing the time when I should come of age, when I perceived a palpable alteration in the tone of my father's letters. He had always been a particularly cheerful writer, and whatever his private sufferings, and during the past twelvemonth I knew they had been great, he was noted for keeping them to himself, especially on paper. I could not, therefore, read the complaints with which his communications were now filled without feeling considerable apprehension on his account ; and the thought of his illness often came between me and the business I had in hand. He had been in the habit for years past of experiencing occasional attacks of gout, which had never failed, however, to yield to medical treatment, and a reasonable amount of time and quiet living ; for my father had led what is called a hard life, and undermined his constitution in more ways than one. Latterly, his disease appeared to have become more obstinate and difficult of management ; and although he had the best advice in London, the enemy retained possession of the capital, and refused to surrender. My father's previous attacks had never been so great as to prevent his being able, with help, to hobble from room to room, or to be wheeled or carried about the house in a chair made for the purpose ; thus, even in the midst of pain, he had been able to divert his mind and carry on his business, by seeing his friends and those with whom he had to do. Now, however, he had been for some weeks completely confined to one room, and his letters, from being originally disposed to make the best of a bad job, became first regretful, next fretfully complaining, and then despondent, until this state of mind, so new to him, culminated in the following epistle, for the receipt of which I was almost prepared :—

“ MY DÉAR GERALD,

“ You *must* come to me. I can't bear it alone any longer. I've been shut up in this room for a month to-morrow, and

there is not the least alteration in my symptoms, nor likely to be, as far as I can make out from the doctor's shuffling statements. The Talbots are in Scotland with some of his people ; but if they were here, I should want you all the same. Get leave as soon as you can ; not for a week, that's worse than none at all—I miss you so dreadfully when you go again—but for as long a spell as they'll give you. If you can manage this, we'll spend the autumn at Grasslands, and perhaps the country air will set me up again.

“Your affectionate father,

“P. ESTCOURT.”

As soon as I had read this letter I applied for three months' leave, which I had no difficulty in procuring, as I had never taken more than a few days at a time since joining the battery, and directly I received the order I went to my father in London. I had expected to find him, like most gouty patients, very irritable and fractious, perhaps hard to bear with, and difficult to manage ; but I was not prepared to see him so broken in spirits, and subdued by continuous pain, that his fine firm character seemed to be lost in the querulous complaints of an invalid. When I first entered his room he was sitting in an arm-chair, his foot, which had attained a frightful size, supported on a rest before him ; and as I approached his side, he thrust out his hand to seize mine, attempted to mutter some expression of his delight at meeting me again, but broke down instead, and actually shed tears. If I had witnessed the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington mopping its face with a pocket-handkerchief, I could scarcely have been more surprised.

“Good God, sir !” I exclaimed, “why did you not inform me before of the state to which you have been reduced ? I could have come three months ago as well as now ; and you might have been saved much of the confounded *ennui* from which you have evidently suffered.”

My poor father looked thoroughly ashamed of his weakness, as he passed the back of his hand across his eyes ; but with the usual fearlessness of his character where another man's opinion was concerned, he had no hesitation in confessing the cause of his emotion.

“You mustn't think less of your old father, Gerald, for

being too glad to see you. The fact is, boy, you're the dearest object in the world to me. A woman may or may not have had the power before now to draw tears from my eyes : but I'll guarantee that you are the first man who has done so. I really have been longing to see your ugly face. And I've had a deuced lot of pain to bear since I saw it last, I can tell you."

After my arrival, however, my father rapidly improved in spirits, if not in health. He became quite cheerful again, and some of the pleasantest if not the liveliest hours which I spent, were passed in his bedroom. His great desire was to go to Grasslands ; and as soon as he could bear the motion and fatigue of the journey, I took him down into Dorsetshire. We had not inhabited the place for years, although we generally spent part of each shooting season there ; but it had been left in charge of careful hands, and everything was in readiness for our reception. My father's principal medical adviser in London, a physician of high standing, had agreed to visit him twice a-week at Grasslands, and for some days after we arrived there I was too much occupied with carrying out his injunctions to think of anything else.

At the end of that time, however, my father suggested that I should go over and pay my respects to my grandmother, of whom I had seen very little since entering the army. So one morning in July I mounted my horse and rode to Wiversdale. Mrs Estcourt was now a very old woman, verging on eighty-five, but as active as it is possible for a person of that advanced age to be—taking her daily walk in the garden, and reading print without the least difficulty. I understood, however, that her memory had become rather clouded of late years, and therefore I was not surprised, when I first entered the familiar library, to find that she did not recognise me, particularly as I had grown considerably since I had visited her last, and had a good deal of hair upon my face.

"*Who* do you say ?" she kept on demanding in shrill accents of her daughters, as they attempted to make her understand the identity of her own grandson. "*Sam's* son ? why, that's poor Lascelles ; he died before your father, my dear."

"No, mother—this is Gerald, Sampson's second son, who was brought up by Lady Mary, you know."

"I never liked her !" quoth my grandmother irrelevantly.

"No, grandmamma ; but I'm sure you'll like me, if you'll look at me," I said, thinking it best to storm the fortress of her indifference. Much of my childish dislike of my grandmother had been forgotten as subjects of greater importance to myself had occupied my mind ; and as I knelt beside her arm-chair now, and brought my face on a level with hers, I saw that age had softened the expression of her features until it was too much like that of my sick father at home to permit me to cherish any enmity against her.

The old lady took my face between her hands, and regarded me with a look of pleased surprise.

"Why, this is *Sampson*," she ejaculated ; "this is Sampson himself, when he made me so angry by refusing to follow his father's business, and took to writing those trashy books instead."

"No, mother, it isn't," shouted one of my aunts, in a testy manner, into her ear, "it's Sampson's boy. I should think you might understand that."

"I know, my dear, I know," said my grandmother quietly, deprecating the noise by holding up her wrinkled hand ; "but he's very like Sampson—very like indeed. And where is your father, why hasn't he come too ?" All the time she was speaking she kept stroking my face with her fingers, an action so widely different from anything I had previously connected with her feelings towards myself, that I could scarcely believe I was kneeling beside Mrs Estcourt of Wiversdale. I explained the cause of my father's detention, and told her that he would be sure to come to see her as soon as he could walk again.

"And in the meanwhile, you must accept me instead, grandmother, and make the most of me, for I cannot stay long." I then proceeded to give her all the news concerning my father, mother, and sisters, to which she listened complacently. As I mentioned Lady Mary, I saw that the old resentful spirit against her had not died out of my aunts' breasts ; but Mrs Estcourt, if she experienced, did not manifest anything of the kind. She heard all that I had to tell her with apparent interest, but her intellect was evidently weakened ; I found it hard work to make her understand which of my sisters I meant by name, though she met me, directly I spoke of Beatrice, with the old objection, "*Anne*, you mean."

"Yes, grandmamma, *Anne*," I replied. It no longer ap-

peared to me worth while to fight with one so near the grave, and thenceforth I gave in to her little prejudices—even to answering to the name of Sampson, by which she invariably called me ; and her sarcastic nature appearing to have been lost with her memory, I have little doubt that an affection would have been established between us had I been much at Wiversdale at that time, but the state of my father's health kept me close to Grasslands. I perceived that this total change in my grandmother's manner towards myself gave great dissatisfaction to her immediate relatives. The tables were turned now for the domineering mistress of Wiversdale ; her sons and daughters ruled the roast, and she who had been so sharp and snappish with other people, so quick to sneer and to take offence, was snapped up and domineered over herself, and forced by age and debility to submit where she had governed. It was seeing her thus which made my pride relent towards her, and myself forget the fancied injuries she had done me through my mother. There was something so pitiful in viewing the downfall of her erst-while indomitable spirit, and to find her turning even towards me, whom I had always imagined she had so greatly disliked, for protection against the tongues of her own children. She seemed to have grown quite afraid of my aunts, much more so than of my uncles, though they were all now constantly at Wiversdale, taking up their residence there, and issuing their orders as if the house and establishment already belonged to themselves. My grandmother was extremely anxious about my father's health, although she never said a word on the subject before her other sons or daughters. But if we happened to be alone for a few minutes, she would pluck me by the sleeve, and whisper, "How is your father, Sampson ? is he better to-day ?"

And when I had made a due report of the case, she would add—

"Ah ! he's a fine man ; he's a very clever man ; he's a son to be proud of ; but I wish he didn't write those trashy novels."

The "ruling passion strong in death" was forcibly pictured here : my poor old grandmother had forgotten almost everything but the few inconsequential trifles which her bygone obstinacy had chosen to magnify into subjects of importance. I have said before that I was not much at Wiversdale at this

period, from choice as well as necessity : Mrs Estcourt, in her present mood, was well enough ; but I could not stand the cool reception which I invariably met at the hands of my other relations, particularly at those of Mrs Logan, who seemed to have established herself in attendance on her mother, and to whom I felt convinced my cousin had related the circumstances under which I had parted with him. My uncles occasionally visited us at Grasslands, where they ate my father's dinners and drank his wine, and where the potent spell of his presence prevented their intercourse with myself appearing otherwise than friendly. But we were always happier when we were by ourselves. As soon as my father was sufficiently freed from pain to be able to think, he took to his writing again, and spent nearly all his mornings at his desk. One day, on his expressing a wish that I cared for the same sort of work, I ventured to tell him how I had employed my time at Fresh-wave. He immediately became excited on the subject, and begged that I would read out my manuscript to him. At first I was diffident of doing so : it is true he was my father, but he was also one of the best judges of literature of the day. But he encouraged me to proceed by relating anecdotes of his own early failures. In this instance, I am afraid, his critical taste permitted itself to be blinded by his fatherly pride : bribery and corruption there must have been somewhere, for I remember how enthusiastic was his praise of my performance, and *I have it by me still*.

It was "capital !" it was "first-rate !" it was "drawn to the life !" it was the "best thing he had ever heard from a maiden pen !" Such were amongst a few of the commendations which the first-born of my brain received from the author of my being. At last his praise was exhausted ; but not so his enthusiasm. Blackman must see the manuscript, (Blackman was his own publisher ;) he was quite sure Blackman would be of the same opinion as himself, and think that my novel ought to come out at once. Accordingly the papers were forwarded to Mr Blackman, who, in the course of a few weeks, returned a favourable verdict. I have nothing but good to say of this gentleman, with whom I have had the pleasure of transacting some very profitable business since ; but I must be allowed to express my opinion that his own was, in that instance, if not guided, considerably swayed by

the fact that a certain Parton Estcourt, M.P., was not only a very powerful author, but a very powerful man. My father, however, would not listen to any suspicions I entertained on the subject ; but insisted that Blackman was a shrewd, clever fellow—a fellow to be depended on—a fellow who knew what he was about ; and that since he found that his decision tallied with his own, he had a higher opinion of him than ever. We all know how sick people have their whims and fancies ; how they will seize upon a new idea, and for lack of distraction make it their hobby, until a fresher one crops up. In this way my father set to work to revise my manuscript for the press, and rested not until it was completed. He took thrice the interest in the book that I did, doing everything himself, even to correcting the proofs, and carrying on a long correspondence with printers and publishers relative to title-pages, tinted paper, and bevelled boards. I believe that no novel that ever appeared yet was made so great a fuss about ; but the occupation and little excitement kept my father in good spirits ; it was something for him to think and talk of ; and so the publication of it did the same service for his physical pain that the writing had done for my mental suffering. At last the preliminaries for its appearance were all completed, and my bantling went to press under the title of “*The Quarry of Fate.*” Meanwhile August had slipped into September ; the shooting season had commenced, and I was out with my gun every day. It was solitary work tramping over the turnip-fields and the stubble all by myself, and to think of my poor father who had been as active as I was two seasons before, tied so completely by the leg that he might as well have been bedridden ; but to shoot alone is better than not to shoot at all. I had had hopes of procuring the company of Jack Lascelles ; but there had been some temporary disturbance in Ireland, where he was then quartered, and his leave had been refused from the Horse Guards. My brothers-in-law, Lyndon and Talbot, were coming to us later in the season ; but for the first month I was alone. Walking daily over a large expanse of ground, much of which led past the habitations of man, necessarily implied a certain number of mild adventures, and one of mine was of rather a pleasant nature than otherwise. I had several times during my wanderings in our grounds encountered a couple of young girls, apparently sisters, who

invariably, amidst a great deal of giggling, ran away at my approach. But when the same thing had happened two or three mornings in succession, I asked the gamekeeper who accompanied me if he knew who they were.

"Well, sir," was the reply, "I believe their name rightly is Sherman; leastways they live in the same house with parties going by that name. One of the new line of houses, sir, the other side of the village: they've been mostly taken by strangers, and I can't say I know much about 'em. These—these—young ladies, sir, haven't received no permission, as I know of, to be on the grounds, and if it s your pleasure I'll warn 'em off."

I could quite understand the gamekeeper's hesitation as he endeavoured to give the girls I have mentioned their proper designation. They were not young *ladies*—any one could see that; and yet they appeared too refined to come under the category of young *women*, technically applied.

Several changes had taken place in the village of Grasslands since we had resided there, and one was the building of a row of cockney-looking houses, which were neither villas nor cottages, and were chiefly inhabited by the better style of artisans, or small tradesmen. Our long absence from the place, except during the shooting season, had doubtless given the villagers a good deal of licence in the way of walking over the more unfrequented parts of our grounds; and my giggling friends were too young and too pretty for me to entertain such an idea as "warning" them off the property. The constant *rencontres*, however, added to their very evident desire to attract my notice, naturally led to my speaking to them, particularly when, as I suddenly approached them one day, with my gun over my shoulder, I heard first a smothered shriek, then a scuffle, and the words, "Run, Addy—here he is again."

I think, under the circumstances, there are very few young men who would not have given chase. I came up with them at the padlocked gate of the next field, which they were making violent attempts to climb.

"Now," I said, "what do you suppose I ought to do to you for trespassing on my grounds in this manner?"

They looked at one another with elevated eyebrows, and then burst out laughing, and said, "*Don't, Addy!*" and

"Don't, Juli!" with an impatient movement of the elbows as they spoke, I holding them meanwhile in fast imprisonment, and examining them closely. They were exceedingly pretty girls, I was going to add, for their station in life; but I believe that for *animal* beauty the lower classes are not to be surpassed. These sisters (for they were sisters) were both in possession of big blue eyes, straight noses, and ripe pouting lips. Their complexions were very fair, and their hair almost flaxen. Their figures were small and well-formed, and if their hands and feet did not bear upon them the unmistakable marks of blood, they were at all events not large enough to court especial notice. So much I observed in a very short time, and also that, notwithstanding the similarity of their features, the one who was called "Juli" was the prettier of the two, and "Addy" was the more impudent.

"Do you know that there is a board in this field to the effect that all trespassers will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law?" I repeated, in a voice of portentous gravity.

They continued to look at one another, and laughed; but every now and then the four blue eyes glanced archly in my face, with an expression that seemed to say their owners would not be silent long.

"Now, what excuse have you to make for yourselves, in order that I may not take proceedings against you?"

"We are not trespassers," said one of the girls, "we are ladies."

"I grant the last fact," I said, doffing my Glengarry, "but not the first. You are trespassers, and I shall inflict a fine upon you. Prisoners at the bar—what are your names?"

This feeble witticism was received with such shouts of laughter, that I perceived my character for being a wag was established at once.

"My name is Adelaide Sherman, and my sister's is Julia," said the least pretty and most pert-looking of the two.

"Very good," I replied; "perhaps you have saved your head by that answer. Now, will Miss Julia decide what penalty she considers I ought to inflict upon her?"

I looked at the other sister as I spoke, and she blushed most becomingly under my scrutiny; and when I repeated the question, replied—

"I think it will be quite sufficient punishment for us to be helped over the gate by you."

"Bravo," I exclaimed, raising her in my arms. "I demand immediate payment of the forfeit." So I lifted them both over the gate, and took off my cap, as they ran like hares towards the village, Adelaide looking back, with a laugh and a nod, which nearly led me into the folly of a second pursuit. When I turned back to rejoin the gamekeeper, I found him, with a grim smile struggling through his look of respect.

"A queer lot, Jenkins!" I observed, with the air of a *connoisseur*.

"Very queer, sir, begging your pardon. Their faces will be their *misfortune*, as the saying goes. Will you take the Home Close to-day, sir?"

I would; and fourteen brace of partridges soon drove the remembrance of Miss Addy and Miss Juli Sherman out of my mind. I mentioned the circumstance to my father in the course of the evening, but he did not know the name of Sherman. He concluded they were new comers. If the girls were troublesome, I had better give them a hint to quit. Half-and-half people were often very presuming, and difficult to get rid of. He had had a letter from Blackman, and the "Quarry of Fate" would appear on the 15th of the month. Had I written to Beatrice, as he had desired me? and thus dismissed the subject.

But I did not give the Misses Sherman notice to quit, although I had plenty of opportunities of doing so, as I never failed to meet them daily, either in the grounds or the village. They appeared to spend all their time out of doors, and most of it in lying in wait for myself. It was not easy work flirting with two girls at once; in fact, I found it very difficult, especially as Miss Adelaide proved of a jealous disposition, and was apt to make our strolls unpleasant if I paid too much attention to her sister. Julia was my favourite, not only because she was prettier and more refined than the other, but because, if not more retiring, she was less openly pert than Adelaide. But they were always together, and therefore I had little opportunity of showing my preference.

For several weeks I flirted with these girls in a very decided, but withal a very commonplace manner—flirted posi-

tively because I had nothing better to do, and they threw themselves so constantly in my way, that I could not avoid them. During which time I wasted a good deal of money on presents for them, and received at least an equal number of kisses in return ; but having arrived at this stage of the proceedings, I began to get a little weary of the whole affair. I had no intention of wronging either of them, and their station in life, of course, precluded any idea of marriage. I felt, therefore, as if I had reached a barred gate in the course of my flirtation, over which I could neither climb nor vault, and so I turned my attention in another direction with the greatest complacency. The middle of the month was now past, and my book had appeared. The *outside* was all that an author could desire, and my father declared that the story read better in print than it had done in manuscript. He waited, therefore, with much anxiety, to see the opinions of the press upon it, an anxiety which I confess to have fully shared with him. They soon appeared, and for a first work were decidedly favourable.

"Mr Gerald Estcourt," said one of the principal papers, "has discovered the great secret of success in novel-writing. He paints men and women as they *are*, not as they ought to be ; and his story is consequently true to nature, and appeals to the hearts of those who read it."

"We hail," enthusiastically wrote a second, "the appearance of a novel by the son of Mr Parton Estcourt, one of England's most widely-read authors, whose works are as celebrated for their cleverness as they are for their popularity. Mr Gerald Estcourt's work contains much of the forcible style of his father's writing, combined with a pathos and tenderness of treatment which cannot fail to secure him many readers."

"A book of great promise," so ran a third review. "Full of beauties of expression and style, mingled with a dash of sarcasm which reminds us of the justly-renowned works of the author's father. Mr G. Estcourt, in his 'Quarry of Fate,' has done well ; but he will do much better. We prognosticate for him a speedy rise to the first ranks of our native novelists."

These extracts are a few out of the many notices which appeared, and delighted my father, as of course they delighted me also. I had been very modest as I contemplated the fate of my book. I knew it was as good as many that issued from

the press ; but with the name of my father to maintain, I felt that the productions of my pen should rise above the level of ordinary literature. I had feared for him more than for myself. I had been so afraid for the shame and disappointment he should feel when my work was dissected by the critics, and its dishonoured carcass thrown out to rot upon the dunghill of obscurity, as so many had done before it. I had thought then that I should be contented with a very small *quantum* of praise—that the mildest commendation would be thankfully received ; but the danger successfully passed, I began, agreeably to poor human nature, to plume myself, and strut about and crow, and wonder that, with the knowledge of the *divine afflatus* within me, I should ever have contemplated a serious defeat. I did a little of the literary haw-haw style during those days ; talked largely of the impossibility of real strength ever being kept in the background, and how, in the long run, force of mind *must tell*, whatever the disadvantages under which it laboured ; talked a great deal of nonsense, in fact, to which my father listened with fond complacency, and my uncles with shrugging shoulders. I patronised the reviewing papers also, praised them for their discernment and clearness of judgment, and wondered how any one could be in such dread of a “slating” from them, except, indeed, when they published trash, which fell still-born from the press. This remark being made in the presence of my uncle William, who had written a pamphlet the year before, which had been deservedly annihilated for the impossible theories it professed to uphold, did not tend to impress that gentleman in favour of myself or my production.

I was deeply struck by the wisdom of the paper last quoted, which prophesied that I should become the author of something still better than “The Quarry of Fate,” and wished to begin another book at once in consequence, thinking that every hour now devoted by me to other pursuits was a fraud upon the world, which was impatiently waiting to hear from me again. But in this instance my father’s sense outstripped his affection. He begged, he even insisted, that I should permit a reasonable interval to elapse before I made my second bow to the public. So far I had done well ; but my next attempt should be much better, and between this and that I must travel and enlarge my mind. When he had fully

recovered his health, he said, he should much like to make a continental tour in my company. We would penetrate into Italy, even to Spain together. After such a holiday we should both return refreshed to our work again. So we planned, and so we proposed to put into execution. Meanwhile September was over, and the Lyndons and Talbots were with us.

CHAPTER XIV.

GERALD LOSES HIS FATHER.

"WHEN he had fully recovered his health ;" the words seemed to strike with a sad resonance upon my mental hearing, as one afternoon I strolled down the village street of Grasslands alone. I had commenced to feel very anxious about my father ; the temporary excitement consequent on the preparation and publication of my book having subsided, his health had visibly retrograded, and I could not help seeing how much weaker each paroxysm of pain left him. The bare idea of my hearty energetic father becoming crippled or enfeebled for the remainder of his life was dreadful to me. I turned the horrid thought into a lively whistle, and with rapid steps attempted to out-walk my fancy.

"Good-evening, sir ; we have had a splendid day."

I had already gained the outskirts of the village, and was passing the new-built row of houses previously alluded to. Raising my eyes at this unexpected address, I encountered the form of a man in his shirt-sleeves, who was leaning over the railings of one of the little gardens, smoking a long clay pipe. I knew the number of the house inhabited by the parents of the Sherman girls, although I had never been inside it, and I concluded the stranger before me was their father, although I had not had the honour of a personal introduction to him before.

"Good-evening to you ; we have so."

I was busy with my own thoughts and speculations, and had no inclination to enter into a promiscuous conversation

with him. But Mr Sherman seemed disposed to improve the acquaintance.

"I hope that your respected father is better to-day, sir."

I could not but stop then and reply to the inquiry, whereupon he opened the gate and pressed me to enter.

"I trust you will do me the honour to step inside, Mr Estcourt; our little domicile can hardly compare with the Hall; but an Englishman's house is his castle, you know, sir, all the world over. I believe you are already acquainted with my young ladies; they are both at home, and will be pleased to see you—I can answer for them—and so will Mrs Sherman."

I murmured some plea of want of time and engagements at home; but he stood there, bowing, with the gate open, until I thought the shortest way would be to do as he desired me. He was an unpleasant-looking man; large-headed and small-bodied, with the eye of a serpent and the voice of a dove; a man who would talk another over against his will, but to oppose whose suave pertinacity must inevitably end in ill words. He ushered me into a little sitting-room, which was filled with a glaring sun, and had a general air over it of woollen mats and anti-macassars; and introduced me to Mrs Sherman, a faded, flaxen-haired nonentity in crushed cap and creased gown, from whom it was evident the daughters had derived their beauty, whilst their impudence probably came from the other side. The walls of the apartment were hung with third or fourth rate oil paintings of dogs, horses, and houses; and in a very few minutes the *père du famille* enlightened me on the nature of his occupation.

"An artist, sir," he said, inquiringly; "do anything in this line?" waving his hand towards the productions in question. I told him that I regretted to say I possessed no such talent; that my accomplishments were, in fact, very few and far between; at which Miss Juli and Miss Addy giggled, and the faded mother exclaimed, with a deprecating wave of her mitted hand, "Don't say so."

"You mustn't expect the ladies to believe that, sir," continued Mr Sherman, with an air of facetious patronage; "but all are not gifted in the same manner. I was born, Mr Estcourt, with a brush in my hand."

Without stopping to inquire into the particulars of such a

natural phenomenon, I remarked that I concluded the paintings I saw around me were by himself.

"Exactly so, sir, *pre*-cisely ; I trust that they meet with your approbation. The one just before you is the seat of Lord Exeter, taken from the north, and considered to be the best view of the park in existence ; the horse on your right" (Mr Sherman did not positively drop his H's, but he had a wonderful facility for slurring over dangerous ground) "is his lordship's favourite hunter ; the one next to it, her ladyship's Arab galloway, both portraits acknowledged to be lifelike. The next view is of the cottage where Lord Burnham spent his honeymoon ; an interesting reminiscence, you perceive, Mr Estcourt. And this painting just behind my head is a likeness of Mr Alfred Marsh's jockey, and his celebrated horse, 'Playful,' that won the Chester Cup in 18—. I have several more paintings, if you'd like to step upstairs ; one, an historical subject, which I flatter myself will repay you for the trouble. You must forgive the enthusiasm of an artist, sir—we live in our productions."

I thought it was a fortunate thing for Mr Sherman if he could live *in* his productions, for there did not appear much sign of his being able to live *by* them, considering the number of orders which had never been "called for." The house, too, was very barely furnished : the dress of the women tawdry and dirty ; whilst the assumption of "gentility" thrown over the whole made the absence of it painfully apparent. I commenced to grow fidgety, and to rack my brain for an excuse to make my escape. I declined to inspect the historical picture on that occasion with as much civility as I could muster, and pulling out my watch, hinted at the approach of my dinner hour.

"Not half-past five yet, sir," exclaimed the officious Sherman, consulting his own timepiece. "You have a fine place up there, I hear," alluding to Grasslands. I acquiesced in the remark, and he continued—

"I have often wished to take the liberty of asking you if I might go over the grounds, some day. My young ladies describe them to me as being very beautifully laid out."

I said they were considered so, and that I would give him an order at some future period for inspecting them. At present my father's illness precluded, &c. &c.

"Of course, sir, of course. Ah! gout is a sad trial—we often think of the poor old gentleman down here. You *have* a view of the Hall, I presume, Mr Estcourt?"

"No; not that I am aware of. But I am really afraid I must take my leave, Mr Sherman."

"Ten thousand pities, sir! it would make a beautiful picture, and one which you ought to possess—which your heirs will value after you. I should take it from the west wing, Mr Estcourt, bringing in the lawn and shrubberies to the side; it would not run very expensive either—a mere trifle—but it's an order which I should have the greatest pleasure in taking from you, sir."

I saw now what the man was driving at, and agreeable to anything which should procure me my release. I commissioned him to paint me a picture of Grasslands, without even asking the price which he charged for his abominable productions. His enthusiastic gratitude disgusted me still more than his bombastic speech had done, and rising from my seat, I cut his eloquence short by bidding "good afternoon" to Mrs Sherman and her daughters.

"Oh! you *must* have a cup of tea with us before you go," expostulated Miss Adelaide, as she strove with ready facetiousness to replace me in the chair I had vacated.

"Yes, surely," drawled Mrs Sherman, arraying her mitened hands upon her lap; whilst the husband had the effrontery to clap me on the back and tell me there was no "hurry." "Addy, my dear, tell Jane to bring in the tea-tray at once, and set it by the open window; it will be so much the cooler and more cheerful."

Tea at the open window with Mrs Sherman and the gentleman in shirt-sleeves! *C'était un peu trop*. I pictured myself, under the circumstances, being gazed at by every servant and ploughboy passing that way, who would not fail to spread the report far and wide that they had seen "Muster Estcourt" taking his tea in the Shermans' "parlour." Whilst Adelaide flew to minister to my delight, I was base enough to beat a hasty retreat, which no remonstrances from the artist, deprecations from the mother, or looks of entreaty from the pretty Julia, could induce me to forego. Even then I was not quite out of danger. As I backed towards the sitting-room door—meeting each attack of my enemies with the formal phrases

of "I am very sorry," "I regret exceedingly," "It is quite unavoidable," &c., I perceived that Julia Sherman kept looking first towards me, and then towards her father, until he blurted out—

"You want to walk up to the Hall with him, do you, you baggage? Well, get on your hat then; I daresay Mr Estcourt here won't be the one to make an objection," with a knowing wink at myself. But I was not to be saddled completely against my will.

"I am sure Miss Sherman will understand me," I replied, "when I say that, however delightful the prospect of a walk with her is to me, I think she had better not accompany me to-day, as business takes me straight to the Hall, and I could not think of permitting her to return alone."

The girl looked disappointed; but her father patted her on the shoulders, and said, "Never mind, Juli. Mr Estcourt is quite right; daylight isn't the time for courting, is it, sir?"

I made no direct answer to this remark, but bidding them a hasty adieu, walked out of the cottage door. As I did so, I was indignant, both at the familiarity which Sherman had assumed towards myself, owing, as I supposed, to my acquaintance with his daughters, and also at the attempt he had made to link my name with that of Julia. The business had gone too far—I saw that plainly; it must be put a stop to altogether. It was all very well to slink about our own shrubberies and plantations with these girls, but quite another thing to be seen walking with them through the village in broad daylight; very pleasant to look into their blue eyes, and squeeze their little waists, since they took care I should have plenty of opportunities of doing so, but a widely different pastime to be drinking tea with their progenitors in the sight of the whole population of Grasslands. I could have sat down in the cottage of one of my father's labourers, and eaten bread and cheese with him, without feeling that I lowered my dignity by doing so; but to associate with this half-and-half family in their half-and-half house, was too much for my powers of endurance. I had fully felt the position I held in Grasslands, as the only son of the only landed proprietor there, and had always been careful to do nothing within its precincts that should bring discredit on my father's name, or put him under the disagreeable necessity of

remonstrating with me on my conduct. As I walked to the Hall that afternoon, I regretted that I had been so thoughtless as to flirt as much as I had done with the Sherman girls; but it is almost as difficult for a young fellow to avoid meeting a woman's advances half-way as it is for him to keep his hand in his pocket when he knows he has plenty of money there. Yet I had never intended or dreamt that my apparently chance meetings with the daughters should lead to an acquaintanceship with the parents. If I was not careful, that man with the serpent-like eyes and dove-like voice, would be trying to force me into a breach of promise of marriage case, or to compromise matters by hush-money, or some such villany. He looked just the subject for such an attempt; but he had come to the wrong person, if he thought that I could be frightened into making a fool of myself. I determined to cut the acquaintance of the whole family from that day; the girls had got several brooches and bracelets and rings out of me, and they must be contented with their spoils. Having company at the Hall was a very good excuse for not taking any more evening rambles, even should I be solicited to do so. My meditations were cut short, as I approached our drive gates, by the appearance of a servant who was looking up the road, and down the road, as if in search of somebody. As soon as he caught sight of me, he left his position and advanced to meet me.

"If you please, sir, would you go on to the Hall? Mrs Talbot wishes to speak to you."

"All right; I was going there." I imagined that a flock of uncles, or male cousins, had probably swooped upon us from Wiversdale, as was often their custom when they found the latter place particularly dull, and that my brothers-in-law being both absent, Emmeline and Gertrude did not know what to do with them until I arrived. I walked straight up to the house, therefore—the servant following me—but to my surprise was met in the hall by Emmy herself, her face bathed in tears.

"Why, what's the matter, Emmy?" I exclaimed, taking alarm.

"Oh, Gerald! we have been longing for you to return. Poor papa is in such dreadful pain, and I have telegraphed for Dr Percivale to come at once; nothing seems to do him

any good ; we have been trying everything we can think of, but he gets worse every minute."

I felt my cheeks blanch under her intelligence.

"Where is he?" I exclaimed, hastily throwing down my hat and stick.

"In bed, dear ; we put him there an hour ago, by his own request : do go up and see him, Gerald ; he has asked for you a dozen times."

I flew up the stairs, and found everything as she had told me. My father was in bed, his features distorted with the agony he was undergoing, although not a sound escaped him. In attendance on him were Gertrude and two women servants, who had been applying every remedy recommended by the doctor for an emergency, without effect ; and their faces were pallid from witnessing the pain they had no power to relieve. When I went up to my father's side, he could not speak to me, although he pressed the hand in which I clasped his own with fierce energy, and his resolute eyes turned to meet mine with the look of a martyr.

"When did this come on?" I inquired of my sister.

"About two hours ago," she replied. "He would have cold applications to his foot this morning, you know, and he was sitting up as usual, when he complained of a great deal of pain, and it increased so rapidly that he was as bad as he is now when we got him into bed. He says it has risen to his stomach, Gerald. We sent two messengers in different directions after you, and Emmeline telegraphed to London at once ; so I trust Dr Percivale will be down here by the last train. But I was sure that cold water would do him harm."

"Did Emmeline say it was urgent ? Have you sent a carriage to meet Dr Percivale ?" I asked anxiously, but my voice shook as I spoke.

My father perceived it, and pressed my hand. I turned towards him, and notwithstanding the expression of anxiety in his eyes, he seemed in less pain.

"How are you now, father?" I inquired.

"Dying, Gerald."

He said the words with a gasp, and yet so decidedly that I dared not dispute them, though they struck on my heart like ice. The idea had not occurred to me before ; and yet something told me he was right : and—I cannot describe what I

felt ; such moments are past description. Gertrude sprung forward, crying,

“ Oh, no, papa ! don’t say that : it’s only your fancy : Dr Percivale will be here soon. It’s the dreadful pain makes you think so ; it must be terrible to bear ; I wish I could bear it for you, poor darling ; but I am sure Dr Percivale will know what to do for it.” And then she fell to sobbing, with her face buried in the bedclothes. My father reached out his hand and placed it on her head—

“ God bless you, my love, and all your sex ; but you generally talk about what you know nothing.” And then there followed another fearful paroxysm of agony, during which we could only stand by his side, and watch his throes with curdled blood, and hearts which had nearly stopped beating. By the last train Dr Percivale arrived, and confirmed our worst suspicions ; the gout had flown to the stomach, and was threatening the regions of the heart. Before the night was over, two of the most eminent physicians in London had been telegraphed for, and were at Grasslands with the morning ; but their combined endeavours failed to arrest the steps of the disease which was destined to bear away my father’s life. My sisters and I never left him : silently we grouped around his bed, anxious only, in the interval of his pain, to catch some word of affection that should remain with us when he was gone. As soon as the physicians had expressed their opinion of his case, he desired to know it. Perceiving that Dr Percivale hesitated to give it—

“ My opinion has swayed—thousands in my lifetime,” said my father, in that spasmodic manner which showed that there was mischief about the heart, “ do you want to make me out a fool—upon my deathbed ? ”

Then he was told, as gently as possible, that as far as human knowledge was to be depended on, his case was hopeless, as every endeavour to provoke the enemy to quit his hold of the interior, and to appear at the outposts, had been made without success.

“ I *knew* it was ! ” he exclaimed, almost triumphantly, “ and if you had said otherwise, I should not have believed you. I never was mistaken.”

The two physicians returned to London : the news of my father’s danger was sent to Wiversdale ; and his room was

thenceforth invaded by relations, who came to sympathise with him upon his approaching death. He received them all kindly—when he was able to speak—but their visits worried him intensely.

“It’s great humbug, Gerald!” he would whisper to me, when they were gone. “They wouldn’t have travelled five miles out of their way to shake hands with me whilst I was well; but each one must needs come to stare, now I lie dying. It reminds me of the dead lion, boy, and the jackass, who kicked at him.”

One thought had disturbed me greatly since the imminent danger of my father had been communicated to me, and this was, that he should leave the world without a personal reconciliation with my mother. Yet, in his present state of irritation and pain, I dared not broach any subject which might possibly distress him. During the next afternoon, however, when he was a little easier, he spoke to me of it himself.

“Gerald—I shan’t last many days at this rate—and I think I ought to see your mother before I die.—It can’t make much difference; for I hope we have both forgiven—long ago; but it may be pleasanter for her to think of afterwards.—I’ve left everything I possess to you, my boy—except a few thousands to Emmeline; for Beatrice and Gertrude are well provided for; and Lady Mary must look after the other girls; but I should like you—when I’m gone, to let your mother live at Grasslands—for the rest of her life. Will you do this, Gerald?”

“You know I will, father,” I replied—“anything that is a wish of yours. Shall I telegraph to my mother, or shall I write?”

“Better telegraph—I don’t think I shall see her otherwise.—Tell her to bring the girls with her; or only Lilly—if the little one can’t travel. I *should* like to—see their little faces again: I wish I had had them—to stay with me before I got ill.”

Although Lilia and Marguerite were both older than myself, my father, owing to his not having seen them since they left Grasslands with their mother, always spoke of them as if they still were children. I telegraphed to Guildford at once, signifying with sufficient plainness the extreme danger he was in, and his desire to see Lady Mary and her daughters

as soon as they could reach him. I informed Emmeline of the step my father had told me to take on his behalf ; and she, with myself, fully expecting the speedy arrival of my mother and sisters, ordered rooms to be prepared for their reception. In the meanwhile, the second day wore away, and the second night was at hand. I was sitting by my father's bedside, whilst he had sunk, from sheer weakness, into a brief slumber, when I heard the sound of carriage-wheels along the gravelled drive. I supposed it was my mother ; and grew quite agitated as I reflected on the interview to come, and wondered what its effects would be upon these two who had sworn to pass their lives together, and after a separation of more than twenty years had only consented to meet as one of them was fast slipping away into eternity. Presently the little bustle which usually attends a new arrival was distinctly heard, and next the sound of many footsteps ascending the stairs. I should have started forward, but my father had fast hold of my hand, and I feared to wake him. What could it be ? My sister would never be so careless as to introduce Lady Mary to the sick chamber without a proper warning. In another minute my doubts were solved : the bedroom door was opened, and there entered—my grandmother. She, who had given up church-going and visiting, and even driving in a carriage ; who had not been out of her own grounds for years past, had driven ten miles in the evening air to see her sick son ; she, who had been said to have no heart, or feelings of womanly compassion ; to scorn the notion of weakness, and to ridicule affection as affectation ; had made this unusual effort rather than my father should go out of the world without speaking to her again. The poor old lady looked very shrunk and feeble, as she walked slowly up to the bedside ; and there was a hollow appearance about her eyes, as if they had sunk since I had seen them last. My father roused himself at her approach, and held out his hand.

“ This is very kind of you, mother,—I didn't think I should see you again ;——well, you won't be long after me, any way, will you ? ”

My grandmother sat down in the chair which I vacated for her ; and I saw that her whole frame was trembling with emotion ; but she put out her shaking hand and laid it feebly upon that of her son.

"We've had a good many quarrels, mother, haven't we?" resumed the sick man, "and I've been too fond of having my own way—but I've left the family a name to be proud of—though you haven't been proud of me."

Mrs Estcourt began to whimper; old age had not left her the strength to sob.

"I *have* been proud of you, my son; proud of you and of your children. Oh! Sampson, I've loved you better than them all put together."

My aunts, Sarah and Susan, were in the room at the time, as well as my sisters; but no one stirred or expressed surprise at this speech of my grandmother's, for as she said it, the withered hands were wrung together; the cracked and quavering voice rose into a cry of bereavement, and the scene was too impressive not to be accepted in silent sympathy by all. My father received it in the firm strong manner in which he had met every circumstance in his life whether of joy or sorrow.

"I am glad to know it, mother;—but my death isn't worth fretting about to you. If you should stay any time after me, though,—be kind to my children." She promised him that she would, and after a brief farewell the interview was closed. They were both too weak, the one from age, the other from approaching death, to be able to stand any excitement long. I accompanied my poor old grandmother downstairs, and helped to put her into the carriage, a task which was by no means easy. As I kissed her to say "good-bye," she held my face close to hers, and began to cry afresh over it. I thought of her words to my father, "I have loved you more than them all," and was patient. A common grief makes us more than kin. Then the carriage drove away, and I returned to the sick-bed.

We had expected Lady Mary to arrive all that day, and as night closed in I began to fear that my telegram had not reached her; but when I consulted Dr Percivale about sending another, he expressed his opinion that it was impossible she could arrive in time, and I thought it best to spare her the pain of arriving too late. My father's sufferings were now pretty well over, but had been succeeded by an extreme weakness, which was not expected to carry him through the night. He continued to doze off at intervals, but he was perfectly quiet

and sensible between whiles. At one time he expressed his regret to me not to have seen Beatrice (who was in Italy), and told me to give her his love and blessing : at another, he asked if my mother had arrived ; and when I replied in the negative, but said I hoped she might yet see him alive, answered—

“It will not make much difference either way:—tell her I forgave her, Gerald, and I hope she forgave me—we were both wrong, I dare say—but I should have remembered she was only a woman. I hope we may meet yet—where there will be no squabbling of any kind. She can’t say that I haven’t loved her children—whatever I did herself.”

The next time he woke, he continued as if there had been no interruption to his speech—

“I hope she will live at Grasslands—I think I shall be happier if she comes back to her old home—and I can think of the children being here. How old am I, Gerald?”

“Sixty-five, father.”

“Am I really? so old as that!—Why, it’s time I went, anyway; and I should never have been of much use again.——I only went down to the House twice this session.——Shall I last till the morning, Gerald?”

“Hardly, father.” I would not indulge in any expressions of my grief before him, because I knew how much he disliked anything of the sort; but I could not help my voice breaking, and he was quick to notice every change.

“Don’t fret, my child!” He said the words as tenderly as if I really had been a child, laying his hand on my arm as he spoke. “I’d rather you didn’t call the girls—poor things, they’re so chicken-hearted—you’ll stay with me, Gerald, won’t you?”

“To the last moment.”

Dr Percivale stole in and out during the night, so did my sisters, but none of them stayed long, and the servants were waiting in the ante-chamber.

“Go on with your writing, Gerald! but *not too fast*, mind that;—you must write for us both now; I leave you my name: don’t soil it.” Then after a pause, “You must leave the army—you cannot do two things well. Remember our motto, ‘*Labore vinces.*’”

The last moment came only too soon. At three o’clock in

the morning, when my sisters were in their beds, the servants nodding in the next apartment, and even the watchful Dr Percivale had consented to stretch himself upon the sofa in the dining-room, and cover his head with his pocket-handkerchief, my father opened his eyes, and turned them upon me.

"Gerald, boy ! lift me up ; I'm going !"

I passed my arm beneath him, and raised him in the bed.

"I have——loved you——better——than them all——put together," he said, and died.

His last words to me were those his mother had used to himself, and the realisation of the fact sent a thrill of pleasure through my heart, which the sequel soon dispelled. Assured that he was really gone, I summoned the doctor and the servants, and, leaving the lifeless body in their charge, rushed to my own room ; and for the first time since his illness had taken a dangerous turn, found leisure to consider the stern truth that henceforth I was to be fatherless, and my own master.



CHAPTER XV.

A FAMILY HEIR-LOOM.

As soon as I had recovered the first shock of my father's death, I began to wonder that we had neither seen nor heard anything of Lady Mary. It appeared almost incredible that the telegram should have miscarried, and yet such an accident was the only solution of the mystery that my sisters and I could accept. We came to the conclusion that some cross-country telegraph office was at fault ; and, in consequence, I wrote my mother a long letter, detailing the circumstances of our bereavement, and our regret that the message had never reached her, thinking that the mere knowledge of its having been sent would be a comfort to her. I begged her not to make any plans until the funeral was over, when I would pay her a visit at Guildford, and have a talk over her future prospects. Until that had taken place, of course it was impossible

for me to leave the house, had I had any inclination to do so. My sisters and I were not allowed much leisure to indulge our grief. As soon as the news of my father's decease had flown round the family, the heads of the different branches arrived from far and near, and took up their residence at Grasslands, to attend the funeral and hear the will read. I had imagined that the week during which a corpse lay in the house was usually one of silent, hasty meals, and a divided household ; but I found it widely different. My sisters and I were naturally disinclined to issue many orders, or to enter with much zest into anything which went on ; but I had begged my uncles and cousins to consider the house as their own, and they took good care to take me at my word. Eating appeared to go on at all hours of the day, so did loud and ordinary conversation ; and although decency forbade their showing themselves beyond the grounds until the funeral had taken place, they managed to make the time pass by strolling about the stables and farm, and pricing the crops and stock. My uncle Jabez had been one of the first to arrive. Strange to say, this brother of my father's, notwithstanding his curt and even rude behaviour, possessed more interest for me than any of the others. It had been matter of surprise to most of Mr Jabez Estcourt's family that he had never married, particularly as he was supposed to be very rich ; I say, supposed, because it was impossible to judge of his real income from the establishment he kept. He resided in a small cottage at Richmond, and his household consisted of two servants, a man and his wife, who did all that he required. Thence he journeyed daily to his business, and was never known to entertain, or suffer himself to be entertained by, any one—except his immediate relations. From these facts my uncle Jabez had gained the character of being very “close.” And it was an interesting speculation amongst the Estcourts who should eventually inherit the wealth which they concluded he must be accumulating. I was, of course, after my poor father, the next male heir ; but I had met with so little favour during my lifetime at the hands of my crusty uncle, that I do not suppose I was even entered on the category of their “eligibles.” The next brother in age was William Estcourt (the father of my friend Joshua), whose eldest son was called “Jabez,” and with respect to whom, therefore, great hopes were entertained. Young Jabez

had accompanied his father to Grasslands, and made good use of his opportunities whilst there ; following his senior uncle about like a shadow ; offering him his aid on every occasion, and receiving the most bearish refusals in the most lamb-like spirit ; as it appeared to me, he would have taken a blow or a kick from him.

My uncle Abel, who was a long thin man of willowy appearance, and seemed as though he had no bone in his back, and the expression of whose mouth suggested the idea that he had just swallowed an emetic, worried me greatly at first by introducing the subject of my soul and my father's soul whenever he could command an audience ; but after I had given him one or two sharp replies, he discontinued the practice, and took to the less expressive one of sighing to the ceiling whenever the conversation threatened to lean towards the forbidden topic. My uncle Joshua, as far as his character was concerned, appeared to be a duplicate of my uncle William ; he was just such another hard-headed man of business, who had lived so long in the world of City and 'Change, that he had no sympathy left with anything that might not immediately influence the rise and fall of the money market. They had wives and children, both of them, but they never mentioned either ; they were men who had the greatest dislike to acknowledge any feeling deeper than such as concerned their monetary affairs ; they bottled up their domestic affections for home use, and doubtless occasionally forgot to uncork them even then. My great consolation was in the presence of Lord Portsdowne and George Lascelles, Jack not having been able to attend. My cousin George was what he had ever been—all affection and sympathy ; and when my uncle wrung my hand, and told me that as long as he lived I should never want a father, the tears were in his eyes. Had it not been for Dr Percivale and these two, I scarcely know how I should have passed through that week with decorum. They were constantly obliged to entreat me to be more forbearing ; to remember *what* lay upstairs ; to think that these, my visitors, were *his* nearest relations—his own flesh and blood. But it was this thought that rendered my task of courtesy so difficult to perform. Mr Logan was there also with his son, who, I believe, would not have dared to show himself within the walls of Grasslands without the protection of his father's countenance ; and Mrs Logan came

in their train, and would have her finger in every pie, from the dressing of my father's body for the grave, to the laying-out of the dessert for dinner, averring openly and without hesitation that she found the household at sixes and sevens ; that nothing had been looked after as it ought to have been ; that there had been shameful neglect *somewhere* ; and, in her opinion, poor dear Sampson must have been positively *robbed*.

I was going to make some reply to her remarks, when Lord Portsdowne laid his hand upon my arm, and I refrained.

"No doubt of it," said Mr Logan, decisively ; "but I am afraid there is little chance of matters being mended now."

"Not under the future *régime*," rejoined his wife, spitefully ; "however, that is nothing to us. I can only grieve, as I look around, to see how my poor brother permitted his extravagant tastes to outrun his prudence. There was no one to restrain or advise him, no one !" and as she spoke she glanced at the pictures which hung round the room.

"I imagine a man has a right to spend his money as he chooses," I said quickly.

"Sampson was always extravagant," observed my uncle William ; "from a boy he never denied himself any luxury to which he had taken a fancy : it's a habit which, sooner or later, must lead to embarrassment."

"And, since he imagined that he had acquired such a name for his books," resumed my aunt, "he seems to have thought nothing good enough for him ; and for the matter of that," (looking towards the spot where I stood, biting my lips in my endeavours to keep quiet,) "to have reared his family in much the same idea ; a great error, as will prove itself some day, if I am not mistaken."

"My father's legacy came in very opportunely for Sam," said my uncle Joshua ; "he couldn't have kept on in the style he was living much longer without it. But Sampson was always for outside show ; he'd rather have the flimsy thing he called fame, because it makes a man talked about, than a solid fortune. I hope those who come after him may prove to have better sense."

Lord Portsdowne's warning touch was of no more avail ; I stepped forward, with eyes that, if they could, would have flashed fire upon the mean defamers of the name once borne by the body now dead up stairs.

"I'll thank you," I commenced, addressing the company in a most determined manner, "as long as you remain under this roof, to refrain from carelessly handling the name of my father, or discussing the motives or consequences of any of his actions. He was worth every one of you put together, a thousand times over ; and if he has left me nothing else, I have inherited from him sufficient courage to stand up for those I love, whether they be dead or alive. And I tell you all, that I will not listen to a single slur cast upon his character, either openly or by covert insinuation. If you cannot praise, you can at least be silent."

I did not leave my position after this heated address ; I stood and looked round the room for an answer, but none came. My uncles Joshua and William looked foolish ; Mrs Logan even seemed to think that they may have gone too far. At last, in rather a nervous manner, she said that "really, offence seemed to be very quickly taken ;" and at the sound of her voice, the men took courage to observe, that the deceased having been so nearly related to themselves, they had considered they were at liberty to talk about his doings, particularly as they had mentioned nothing but what all the world knew.

"Possibly !" was my answer ; "but this is neither the time nor the place to recall anything but his many virtues. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* It is well for us all to remember the words, since we cannot tell how soon we may require the remembrance for ourselves. My father was, at all events, not related to *all* here ; and if I look upon your remarks as uncalled for, I have considered those of others as impertinent."

This I said addressing the Estcourts, but glancing towards Mrs Logan, who shuffled about uneasily for a few seconds, and then made some excuse to leave the room. My aunt sniffed palpably, and said : "Thank goodness, she didn't understand Latin, or any such rubbish." My uncle William remarked, that it was "early days" for me to take up "Sampson's trick of preaching," and my uncle Joshua looked from one to the other as if he had quite forgotten what the sentence I had quoted meant, and did not like to expose his ignorance by asking.

Mr Jabez Estcourt was not present at this little scene, having ridden over to Wiversdale early that morning. A

short time afterwards he returned, bringing intelligence which drove all other thoughts from our minds. His mode of telling his news, and his brothers' mode of receiving it, was so characteristic of the men, that it deserves to be recorded.

It was late on an October afternoon, and cold for the time of year, and when my uncle Jabez entered the dining-room at Grasslands, where all but my sisters were assembled; he walked straight up to the fireplace, and spreading out his coat-tails, commenced to warm himself in the good old British fashion. One of his brothers moved his chair an inch or two backwards to make room for him, but no one spoke except myself.

"Had a cold ride, I suppose, uncle Jabez?"

"Yes," he replied, in the "grumpiest" of tones.

"All well at the Manor?"

To this question he vouchsafed no answer but a grunt, and taking out a toothpick from his pocket-book, began deliberately to pick his teeth.

"How's my mother?" growled uncle William.

"Dead!"

Mrs Logan let the piece of work upon which she was occupied fall from her hands, and dropped, open-mouthed, into a chair. My uncles Joshua and William looked at their brother for a minute, as if to make sure he was not joking; but as he went on steadily picking his teeth, they came to the conclusion that he was in earnest.

"When?" ejaculated the first.

"Three o'clock."

"Humph!" said the second, filially.

"My mother *dead*!" exclaimed Mrs Logan, who had at last found her tongue; "*never*, Jabez! When did it happen? Why didn't they send for me? Sarah and Susan must have known it was coming on. What were they thinking of? Dear me! to think she should be gone, and I wasting the precious moments here;—Gerald, can I have the carriage to return to Wiversdale to-night?"

"Certainly," I replied, only too glad at the prospect of getting rid of her; and in another hour she had taken her departure.

Little by little the details of my grandmother's death were, as it were, *squeezed* out of my uncle Jabez. It appeared that

she had been failing ever since her interview with my dying father ; had taken to her bed as soon as she had returned to the Manor, and slept away the remainder of her life. The circumstance, at her extreme age, was not to be wondered at ; but the way in which her family received the intelligence surprised all but themselves.

“D—n it !” exclaimed Lord Portsdowne, bringing his fist down on the table in his hearty manner, “if I thought that George there, or any of my children, would come to sit still in their chairs when they heard their dear mother was gone, even if she lived to one hundred and eighty, I’d throttle them, Gerald, and that’s the truth. It disgusted me, my boy. No wonder poor Mary couldn’t get on with these people ;” and then remembering *whose* people they were, the dear old fellow stopped short, blushing.

“Never mind, uncle,” I said, “you and I are not the ones to discuss the subject. *He* was not like the rest ; you know that well enough, and yet my mother couldn’t get on with him. It has been a mystery to me all my life, and it will never be solved now.”

Before we went to rest that night my uncle Jabez requested to speak to me, and became quite communicative. My father had now been dead four days ; he was to be laid in the family vault at Wiversdale, and the funeral had been fixed to take place at the end of the week. He wished to know if I would delay the ceremony for another couple of days, so that the mother and son might be interred together. I was quite willing to do so ; no amount of respect that I could pay my dead father appeared too great to me, and I believed that what I had consented to he would have wished himself. It was therefore arranged that the funeral *cortège* from Grasslands should set out at a certain hour for Wiversdale, to be joined there by the other party, and that the burials should take place at the same time, after which the mourners should return first to Wiversdale Manor to hear my grandmother’s will read, and thence to Grasslands to listen to that of my father. On the appointed day, everything happened as had been ordered ; and my uncle Jabez and myself, as chief mourners, followed the remains of our respective parents to the grave. The combined funerals had attracted a large number of us together, and a numerous party was afterwards

assembled at Wiversdale, the only members of which, specially supporting myself, were my uncle Portsdowne, George Lascelles, Dr Percivale, and my late father's solicitors. I had not any interest in my grandmother's will ; I knew that it did not concern me, and had no wish that it should ; for the use of the manor and its belongings had only been bequeathed to her during her lifetime, and her personal possessions were the only things she had to leave away. Hearing the will read, therefore, was a mere form, until the lawyer came to that part which disposed of her jewellery, and the few hundreds she had laid by since my grandfather's death. My uncle Jabez inherited everything, from the manor and its acres down to the coal-scuttle and the hearth-broom ; and the surplus-money was left to my unmarried aunts. As I was listlessly hearing the trinkets next particularised, and feeling that I cared nothing if my aunt Anne or my aunt Sarah got the emerald earrings, I was roused by the sound of my own name.

"Mr Gerald Estcourt," said the lawyer, bowing towards me—Lord Portsdowne touched my arm.

"Eh, what !" I said, starting out of my reverie, with a sigh.

"Your name is mentioned, Gerald."

"*To my grandson, Gerald Estcourt, the Castlemaine diamond ring, with my love,*" read the lawyer, deliberately.

"That must be a mistake," exclaimed my uncle William, hurriedly. "Jabez, that ring should be yours or mine."

"No mistake, sir," said the lawyer, blandly, "the legatee is distinctly stated."

Now, the ring erst-while in my grandmother's possession, and known as the "Castlemaine diamond," was looked upon by the Estcourt family in very much the same light as the English regard the Kohinoor. It was a remarkably large and valuable stone for private property, and had established quite a name for itself in the county. That my grandmother should leave it, or indeed anything, to me, had never entered my head for a moment. I was wonderfully surprised then, and pleased into the bargain. My relations were also wonderfully surprised, but not so much pleased, which made all the difference.

"I dispute the bequest," continued my uncle William, speaking loudly ; "I never heard of such a thing. That's a

family jewel, sir: a ring which has been in our possession for centuries, and always descended from son to son. It should have been left to my eldest brother here, or to myself, not to a boy who cannot know the value of it, and will probably make ducks and drakes of it with the rest of his property."

"It is no use becoming heated about it, Mr Estcourt," replied the lawyer, quietly; "I had the honour of drawing up this will for your late respected mother, and I know that Mr Gerald Estcourt, and no one else, was intended to become the owner of the Castlemaine diamond. The young gentleman in question, if I mistake not, will in due course be the head of the family, and therefore, for my own part, I can conceive no fitter recipient of the family heir-loom. Whatever our separate opinions, however, we have no power to alter this paper," tapping the parchment as he spoke, "which is as succinctly drawn up as any will I ever had to do with."

"It's the only thing he shall take out of this house then," exclaimed my uncle, becoming infuriated by the lawyer's complacency, "and that I'll swear. My eldest brother is not one to be cajoled and deceived into leaving away his possessions from his lawful heirs to any upstart who may think it worth his while to wheedle himself, at the last moment, into his good graces"——

"William, hold your tongue," growled my uncle Jabez, who had witnessed this scene with apparently the most perfect indifference. As the former proceeded with his address, I rose to my feet, preparatory to answering his charges, but Lord Portsdowne whispered to me to keep silence.

"Throw his dirty ring back in his face, Gerald, and let the matter be; it's not worth the owner of Grasslands disputing about." But it was not the ring I cared for, my possession of which was safe enough; it was my character for open dealing which was in danger.

"I am not aware to whom you allude, Mr Estcourt," I said, advancing into the centre of the room, "when you speak of 'upstarts' wheedling themselves into your mother's good graces at the last moment; you cannot certainly mean myself, for every one here knows, that instead of doing too much to win my grandmother's favour, I did perhaps too little; and the fact of her remembering me in her will is scarcely less startling to me than that the bequest should have been

accompanied with her 'love.' My uncle, Lord Portsdowne, advises me to refuse the legacy, since it gives such evident dissatisfaction to the rest of the family, but I do not feel disposed to take his counsel. I am a man now, and able to judge for myself ; and my own opinion is, that my grandmother showed her good sense in leaving it to me, and that the Castlemaine diamond will be more appropriate on the finger of the future Mrs Gerald Estcourt, than on that of any other lady of the family."

So saying, I resumed my seat, and the lawyer proceeded to read out the rest of the legacies, which were small but very equally divided. I could not, however, help hearing the various remarks which followed my speech, amongst which, "insolent puppy," from my uncle William, "the impudence of him," from Mrs Logan, and a prolonged growl from old Jabez were most apparent.

When the reading of the will was concluded, I asked the lawyer at what date the Castlemaine diamond had been bequeathed to me. I thought that it must have been since my father's death, or, at all events, since I had last arrived at Grasslands ; but to my astonishment I found that my grandmother's will had been drawn up five years before, and not touched since. At the very period, then, when our disagreements had been most frequent, and I had imagined this strange old woman liked me least, she had settled to leave me her most valuable possession. The thought softened me greatly.

The reading of the will at Grasslands was almost as much a form as it had been at Wiversdale. My father had summed up its contents in the few words he spoke to me on his death-bed ; with the exception of ten thousand pounds to Emmeline, whose marriage was not so wealthy as those of her sisters, and an injunction that the allowance he had been used to make Lady Mary should be continued until her death, everything was left unreservedly to me. I had never yet been sufficiently interested to inquire of what income I should eventually become possessed ; I now found that, all burthens to the estate complied with, I was the owner of a clear three thousand a year, the rest of my father's annual expenditure having been defrayed by the proceeds of his writing.

But three thousand a year, backed by such a place as Grass-

lands, was no mean heritage for a young fellow of my age to come into. Lord Portsdowne said something to this effect as, the rest of my uncles having taken their departure, he kindly congratulated me on my prospects. I listened patiently until he had finished his harangue, and then my eyes went wearily round the empty room, and I seemed to feel for the first time that *his* presence could never fill it more.

"I would give it all," I exclaimed, passionately, "a thousand, thousand times over, to hear *his* voice once again." I attempted to leave the room with dry eyes; as I spoke, but my uncle's kind hand was placed upon my shoulder, and I sat down at the table and cried like a child instead.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNFORGIVING WIFE.

IN another week Grasslands was shut up again. My sisters had hurried away for change of scene, Lord Portsdowne and George Lascelles had returned to London, and I was on my way to Guildford. A clumsy ugly hatchment frowned from the front of the hall; the chief apartments were locked up; the shutters closed; and the old place left to as deep repose as was its late master in the vault at Wiversdale.

I arrived at Guildford late in the afternoon. The town, never a lively one, looked more cheerless than ever; the leaves were already stripped off the few trees which adorned its environs, and a steady rain had been falling for some days. The stuccoed front of the terrace where my mother still lived was green and black from the damp and the smoke; and as I came in sight of it again, I thought I had never seen a more melancholy-looking place. Lady Mary and Miss Estcourt were not at home, so the servant who opened the door informed me. I was surprised at the intelligence, for I had given them ample notice of my arrival; but poor Marguerite was always to be seen, and in another minute I was seated by her side. This patient sister of mine had not improved in

health during the last few years ; on the contrary, the spinal weakness from which she suffered had greatly increased, but she had grown so used to a recumbent position that her spirits were more equable than they had been when she was first laid upon her back. Our meeting was necessarily a sad one, for Marguerite was an affectionate girl, and the fact of her never having seen her father since she could remember him, appeared, instead of lessening, to have rather aggravated her distress at the news of his death.

"If I had only known him, Gerald, for ever so short a time," she exclaimed, weeping — "if I had the slightest memory of his face, by which to think of him, I should be so thankful ; but when I attempt to recall his features it is all a blank, and I can't help fancying that when we meet again we shall not know each other."

I combated this idea as well as I could, and told her what her father had said on his deathbed respecting his wish to see her and Lillias before he died.

"But I don't see how you could have gone to him, my dear girl," I continued, "even had the message reached you. By the way, I must make some inquiries about that telegram whilst I am here ; there must have been gross carelessness somewhere, for my mother never to have received it. I know that there was no mistake on the Dorsetshire side."

Marguerite coloured a good deal whilst I was speaking, and the circumstance directed my attention to herself. She was lying on the sofa, fully robed, and on observing more closely, I saw that the material of which her dress was composed, although black, was of a very ordinary texture, and totally untrimmed by crape or any of the outward signs of deep mourning.

"This is surely very slight mourning for the occasion, Marguerite," I said, touching the folds of her skirt. I was, of course, dressed in the deepest myself ; and although I was aware that black crape and bombazine are often adopted by those who have no sorrow in their hearts, so long as the custom is an acknowledged one in society, the neglect of it must imply a certain want of respect to the deceased. My sister blushed still deeper, and said that she thought it was. "But I am not able to look after such things myself, dear Gerald, as you know, and am obliged to wear whatever mamma thinks

fit to buy me. I remonstrated with her, but it was of no use. She said it would be absurd of me to load my dress with crape for a person I had never seen, and I had no choice in the matter."

"And do Lillas and my mother permit the same objection to apply to themselves?" I asked, "for there might be some excuse for you, Marguerite, since you never go out."

"Lily's dress is the fac-simile of mine," she replied; "and as for mamma's, why, you'll see it, Gerald, presently, and then you can judge for yourself."

"Lillas, at all events, is old enough, and able to follow her own inclination," I said, warmly.

"Lillas is led in everything by mamma," replied Marguerite.

"Marguerite, tell me," I exclaimed, as a sudden suspicion struck my mind, "did that telegram ever reach my mother?"

"Oh! ask her yourself, Gerald, pray don't ask me; it is all so miserable and so wretched; I cannot bear to think of it."

I refrained from further questioning, as she desired me; but her evasion raised some very bitter thoughts in my heart, and as I heard my mother's footsteps in the hall, I rose to my feet, with a stern determination, should my suspicions prove correct, to tell her what I thought of her behaviour. She entered the room, accompanied by Lillas, and saluted me in the most off-hand manner, as if nothing unpleasant had occurred since we had last met, or rather as though we had parted the day before, and had only to relate the adventures of the intervening twelve hours to one another. I saw at a glance that both she and my sister had on dresses and mantles which might have passed for ordinary costume, that Lady Mary wore no widow's cap, and that white flowers mingled with the black net and silk of which Lillas' bonnet was composed. I stood by Marguerite's sofa, biting my lips, and regarding my mother with marked displeasure in my countenance, as she advanced to greet me, saying carelessly—

"What, my dear Gerald; you here already? Lily and I made sure we should be home in time to welcome you; however, I suppose Marguerite has been doing her best to amuse you."

"I was not likely, mother," I said, as I coldly returned her

kiss, "to expect or to wish for much amusement, coming straight as I have from the scene of so great a bereavement as my father's death has been to me ; but I confess you might have prepared a better welcome for me than the sight of so much disrespect paid to his memory."

"Disrespect paid to your father's memory, Gerald ! what are you talking about ?" she asked, sharply ; whilst Liliás, turning towards me, appeared quite ready to engage in an argument on the subject, and poor Marguerite, with burning cheeks, cast her eyes down upon her lap.

"I am talking about what I *see*," I answered, firmly. "Mother, I know very little about ladies' dresses, and such things ; but however slight my experience, it has been sufficient to teach me that few people would guess from your appearance, and that of my sisters, that you had just lost a husband and they a father."

Lady Mary looked perfectly conscious of the meaning of my address ; but the only effect it produced was to cause a rapid hardening of her eyes and mouth ; and when she adopted this expression, I knew of old that some remark deteriorating to my father's character was sure to follow.

"Can you say with truth, Gerald," she commenced, in her most icy tones, "that I *have* lost a husband or my daughters a father ? You were an infant in arms when I left Grasslands, and you are now of age. During all that time we have neither known nor seen the person whom you mention. His death makes no difference to us either way, excepting that the Lord has mercifully lifted a very heavy yoke from off my shoulders." And my mother finished her sentence with a deep sigh.

"But it was by your own desire that you separated from him," I rejoined, quickly. "If I have understood my uncle Portsdowne rightly, whoever was the first to propose a separation, you were the one most eager to adopt and carry out the plan. He has told me more than once that it was not only his wish, but even my father's, that you and he should come to some sort of compromise in the matter ; but that, the idea once started, you never lost a moment until the whole business was completed."

At this Lady Mary became very angry.

"My brother Portsdowne had no right to discuss the mat-

ter with such a boy as you are, still less to enlighten you as to his private opinions. I consider he is greatly to blame, and I shall take an early opportunity of telling him so."

"That must be as you please, mother," I replied; "but it has nothing to do with the question in hand. I left my three elder sisters dressed as I am myself, in the deepest mourning; I come here to find Liliás and Marguerite robed in ordinary black dresses, and yourself without even the mark of your widowhood. Your feelings on the subject you cannot prevent; but for the neglect of an outward form there can be no excuse, and I consider your present behaviour scarcely decent."

A dead silence followed this speech: I had expressed myself without warmth, but with great determination, for I felt indignant, remembering the kindness with which my father had spoken of these women on his death-bed, to find that they were even putting themselves to trouble in order to show their indifference to what had been so great a loss to myself. My mother and sister were about to take this opportunity to leave the room, but I detained them.

"Whilst we are on this subject," I said, "let us have done with it. Mother, did you ever receive the telegram which I sent you from Grasslands?"

"The telegram on the first occasion of your father's danger?" she inquired.

"Yes: what other? the message which told you of his approaching death and desire to see you. Did it reach Guildford?"

"It did, Gerald."

"You got that message, mother, and you never came?"

"I got that message, Gerald, and I never came. It may be all very well, when a man has behaved for twenty years with systematic cruelty to the woman whom he made his wife, for him to wish to patch up a reconciliation, as a salve to his conscience, when he knows himself to be dying; but you must excuse me if I say that I have no faith in the sincerity of a desire which has been so long delayed. A few words are easily spoken, but they can have no power to obliterate the memory of years of coldness. I might have gone to Grasslands, and taken up my station at your father's bedside; but I should have been no more his widow in feeling for that act than I am now. I could not conscientiously have said that I

had any pleasure in meeting him again. I trust I have forgiven the injuries I have received from him and his people ; but I have not forgotten them, and it is not in human nature to suppose that I should."

"God forgive you !" I exclaimed, passionately. "And that man spoke as kindly of you on his dying bed as he could have done—sent you his forgiveness, trusted he had yours, and spoke with hope of meeting you again where there should be nothing but peace between you."

Lady Mary smiled in a wintry manner, and shook her head, as if there was little chance of my poor father gaining the same rest to which her long-suffering purity entitled her.

"I trust it may be so, Gerald, though I have little faith, as I told you before, in a deathbed repentance. 'Through much tribulation' we inherit the kingdom."

"I expect there are some of us who will never inherit it at all," I exclaimed, bluntly ; "and my Bible reading has taught me that we are none the safer for making so sure upon the subject."

"I shall not argue the matter with you, Gerald," replied my mother, sternly. "You received good training whilst you were under my care ; but you have been now, for many years past, removed from my influence, and I do not expect that you will be brought back into the fold, except as through fire. Till that blessed event happens, there can be no sympathy between you and me on matters which concern the soul."

"My object in coming down to Guildford," I said, taking no notice of the gauntlet she had thrown down, "was to consult with you on your future prospects. By my late father's will you are entitled to continue to receive the allowance he made for you for the remainder of your lifetime ; and it was his desire (a desire with which I trust, mother, notwithstanding your thankfulness for your release, you will, for my sake and my sisters', comply) that you should henceforward take up your residence at Grasslands. I am amply otherwise provided for, and in carrying out his wishes you will be acceding to my own. It is with the intention of settling this business with you that I am here."

At this proposal Lady Mary turned positively white with rage.

"Live at Grasslands!" she exclaimed; "return to the place from which I was expelled, which ought by right to have been left to me, as a pensioner on *your* bounty; permit my daughters to be patronised by the people who took pains to be insolent to myself! This is indeed the last drop in the cup. If things were as they should have been, Gerald, everything in that establishment would have been left to me, at all events until my death; and I should have been laid under obligation to no one; as it is"——

"As it is, mother, they are as good as left to you. My father's wish was that you should enjoy Grasslands and all its belongings for the rest of your lifetime, and you need not be afraid that I shall ever remind you that you are keeping me out of my property."

"It is no such thing," she answered, rudely. "Such an arrangement is only another instance of your father's wish to insult me; and you must be mad to have consented to be the bearer of such a message. Do you imagine that I would subject myself to meeting again *your* uncles and aunts"—(since I had been regarded by my mother in the light of my father's son, the whole burden of the family was invariably laid upon my shoulders)—"with the memory of their former insults fresh in my mind?"

"Fresh after a lapse of twenty years?" I replied. "You must have a retentive mind for others' trespasses, mother. My father was sixty-five, and you are but a few years younger. Is it worth while to cherish enmity when we have so short a time in which to indulge it? You have always told me that my grandmother was your bitterest enemy; she, at all events, is gone, and during the last months of her life expressed no ill-feeling against yourself, as I can testify; and I begin to think now that much of what you conceived to be especial spite was due to the roughness of her character."

I then detailed the story of Mrs Estcourt's will, and the fact of her having left me the celebrated Castlemaine diamond five years before. "And I shall always value it," I continued, "less for its intrinsic worth than for the insight which the reception of it has given me into the feelings which my poor old grandmother evidently cherished in my behalf."

Lady Mary burst into tears of rage.

"Go on," she said, witheringly, between her breath-catching

sobs. "Go on, Gerald. Extol your grandmother to the skies! Of course she was everything that is delightful! I have never loved you or taken care of you; I have not watched over you, and prayed to God for your welfare night and morning. Your mother is *nothing*; she has no grand houses and estates to leave you; no money, wherewith to indulge your body to the detriment of your soul; no *diamond rings*" (my mother almost ground her teeth over these words) "to bequeath, whereby you may remember the feelings she has cherished for you." And here Lady Mary's sobs choked her further utterance.

"This is perfectly absurd!" I exclaimed. Young men, and indeed men of all ages, have seldom much sympathy with a woman's tearful reproaches, particularly reproaches that are mixed with so much sarcasm and so little sense, and my indignation against my mother's present conduct and opinions was very great; but my former affection for her, although wearied by her constant appeals to it, had not all died out, and I knew that, however great her injustice, her trials had been of adequate proportion. Some thought of this kind flashed through my mind now, and prevented me from answering her as harshly as I might otherwise have done.

"You know as well as I do, mother, that the difference between your circumstances and those of my father or grandmother has never made the least difference in my love for you. You can scarcely have thought how great an insult you offer to my capacity for right feeling by the supposition, or you would surely never have made it. The separation between our parents has been fraught with miserable consequences to all of us; not the least of which, to myself, is the fact that as soon as my father commenced to love me, you ceased to do so. But you cannot accuse me of having inherited the fickleness of your disposition: as far as in me lay, I have always tried to love and do my duty to you both; and if your jealousy was so great that you would not accept a divided affection, that was not my fault. All earthly rivalry is now over between you; as far as you are concerned, your son belongs to you only; but if we are to renew, and to continue on terms of peace with one another, it must be on the understanding that all honour is paid, in my presence, to my father's memory, both by word, deed, and insinuation. I

tell you now frankly, what during his lifetime I hardly dared to say, that I loved my father from the bottom of my heart, and that I shall always cherish the remembrance of his goodness to me as one of the greatest blessings I have received at the hands of heaven."

I think my mother was considerably struck by the firmness with which I spoke, and perhaps she admired the boldness my words displayed, for she ceased her wailing and made me a very calm and sensible reply. But all my endeavours to persuade her to agree to her late husband's wish by living at Grasslands proved unavailing. She stoutly refused to go near, or have anything to do with the place; and when I put it on the plea of looking after the house for myself, she advised me to ask Emmeline and Colonel Talbot to accept the charge.

"Your sister has not the same unpleasant recollections connected with it which would make Grasslands hateful to me. Since you wish it, Gerald, we will in future avoid all discussions of, or reference to, the doings of your late father, but you must, on your part, cease trying to persuade me even to look again on a spot where I have been so miserable."

"But surely you will not remain in Guildford, mother," I said; "it is a wretchedly dull place for the girls; and you will all be the better for a change." At this my sisters looked up eagerly; it was evident that my proposal met with their approbation.

(Here I must digress for a moment, in order to relate that Lilius' engagement to the round-faced curate, who was of strictly evangelical principles, had been brought to an abrupt conclusion the year before, by his marrying a round-faced cousin of his own, for whom it appeared he had always entertained a sneaking affection, and the proposed match having been one that my father totally disapproved of, he had not thought fit to take any steps to resent the affront offered to our family. Since which event my sister and mother had rushed from the lowest depths of one extreme to the most giddy heights of the other; and from having been scandalised at the sight of a cross or the mention of a candle, were now stanch observers of all the ceremonies of the Ritualistic service.)

This being the case, no obstacle existed to their leaving Guildford, and Lady Mary seemed to be of my opinion.

"I have thought of it, Gerald," she replied, "more than once; and if Marguerite had been fit to travel, Lilius and I would have liked to have gone abroad for a short time; but we have as yet decided nothing. It is, however, pretty certain that we shall leave Guildford. What are your own intentions?"

A plan for poor Marguerite's benefit flashed through my mind whilst my mother was speaking; but I said nothing of it on that occasion. I told her that, in accordance with my father's expressed desire, I had already sent in my resignation of the service, and that I intended to spend the next few years in travelling, preparatory to settling down to a literary life. It had always been the path chalked out for me, and the success of the "*Quarry of Fate*" had decided me to adopt it. My mother thoroughly disliked the army; but she pretended to hold the profession of literature in the greatest contempt.

"I had rather," she exclaimed, "that you had chosen to be anything than an author. The only point on which the late Mrs Estcourt and I ever agreed, was in condemning the waste of time necessarily involved in the production of frivolous tales and romances. Oh, Gerald! I wish that you would turn your thoughts towards our holy church."

I reminded her that to write was not, of necessity, to produce trash; that even novels, which carried any weight with them, were capable of influencing mankind; and that I was not careless enough to enter holy orders without a decided tendency towards the vocation. Still, the mere fact of my wishing to follow my father's profession (simply because it *was* his) was gall and wormwood to Lady Mary; and her prejudices being too strong and too unreasonable to be battled with successfully, I abandoned all attempt to do so during the short time I spent at Guildford.

If the character of my mother appears inconsistent to such as may remember how much more forbearing she at one period seemed towards my father and the treatment she had received from him, I can only urge, in answer to the objection, that inconsistency is the most human of failings, and that the heroine who is systematically virtuous is as unnatural a creation as the villain who systematically errs. If no one in this world is perfect, it is equally true that no one is entirely bad.

and that, as the very best have their faults, so surely do the very worst possess some loveable qualities.

My mother's strong point was her love for her children, and jealousy, the vice which almost trampled the virtue under foot. My father was capable of conceiving and inspiring a warm, frank affection, but his obstinacy too often prevented such feeling having fair play. During his lifetime, my mother's pride, and perhaps her cowardice, forbade her saying all she thought about him ; for her reticence, since it did not prompt her to avowed forgiveness, could have sprung from no worthier motive. He, on the contrary, steadfastly opposed during his prosperity to even hearing the mention of her name, relented as soon as he felt that his opportunities for reconciliation were slipping away from him, and wished nothing better than to die friends with her.

Which character was the most loveable, or which the worthiest of love, I leave my readers to determine. Perhaps, being so widely opposite, they were not equally responsible for the effect which circumstances had upon them. "*Non nostrum tantas componere lites.*"

I left Guildford with the fixed idea of asking Colonel Talbot and Emmeline to reside at Grasslands during my absence from England ; and Lady Mary to allow Marguerite to stay there with them. I saw that the girl was not happy under present circumstances, and that the proposed plan would leave my mother and Liliat at liberty to carry out their wish to go abroad.

Strange to say, all turned out as I desired.

Colonel Talbot had had enough of knocking about to last him his lifetime, and as soon as he heard of my father's legacy to Emmeline, had determined to retire on half-pay. They were, therefore, only too pleased to consent to occupy Grasslands for me ; and Emmeline was delighted with the prospect of having Marguerite for a companion.

When it was made known to that poor girl that her sister not only wished to have her, but that Lady Mary had consented that she should go, she was nearly beside herself with gratitude to me and pleasure in her new prospects ; and before I left England I had the satisfaction of seeing her comfortably settled under Emmeline's wing, and delighted with the novel occupation of teaching little Ethel how to read and write.

My mother then got rid of the house and furniture at Guildford, and prepared, with Lilius, to take up her residence in Paris. She was very desirous that I should live with them there, but this I declined. I had no objection to accompany them to their destination, and see them safely at their journey's end, but I had no wish to settle down in a city, or, indeed, anywhere, for some time to come. I had felt the events of the last few months more than I cared to acknowledge, and I wanted a complete change. I wanted to leave everything that worried me behind ; even the recollection, if such was possible, of what had given me pain. And this was not to be effected whilst I moved in the same circle, seeing the old familiar faces, hearing the old familiar voices. I had my mind to enlarge, too ; to stretch with new sights and new thoughts ; to improve by study and by practice ; to render worthy, in fact, to take up the thread of my father's fame, where death had cut it short, and, if possible, add lustre to it. As I thought of this, my eye would brighten, my breast swell, and myself feel that I had been singled out by fate for the pursuance of a high and lofty duty. My resignation of the army having been accepted, I left England, full of noble aspirations, and determined to fulfil them to the utmost. It is so easy to plan and to resolve, so hard to continue and to do !

CHAPTER XVII.

BACHELOR LIFE.

"It is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without vanity, therefore, I will be short." Such are the opening words of Hume's brief autobiography, which altogether occupies but a few pages.

I endorse the sentiment, and wish that I could follow the example. Feeling how hard it is to keep egotism in the background, and yet, in justice to myself, to relate such circumstances as may palliate the follies of my life, I have already been tempted, more than once, to throw down my pen in dis-

gust ; and would have done so, had it not been for the thought that I assumed the office of historian less to transcribe the events of my own matter-of-fact career, than to do honour to the character of one whose virtues set her as far above the level of mankind as I myself am beneath it. Keeping this end in view, I take heart to proceed.

I was away from England for two years. For two years I wandered about in strange places, never staying anywhere long, although I visited many of them more than once. After leaving my mother and Lillias in Paris, I went on to Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, crossing into Spain and Portugal, and lingering in these sunny lands for some months at a time. I did not often travel alone, having generally the good fortune to fall in with some of my countrymen ; now with a parcel of riotous boys, " seeing the world " under the auspices of a tutor, whom they drove nearly frantic in his efforts to keep them together and restrain their wildness ; then with an author travelling " on commission," and anticipating his profits ; and again with a good old-fashioned British family, the ladies of which kept me fully employed in settling their disputes, making their bargains, and stowing away in my unfortunate valise the purchases which they could not get into their own boxes.

At one period George Lascelles joined me, and we journeyed for many a league together ; and a season, long to be remembered, (less, I fear, for its steadiness than its charms,) was spent by Jack Lascelles (who was still my boon companion and dearest friend) and myself in Paris. But during all this time I was not exactly idle. I carried a note-book with me wherever I went, and I let little escape my notice.

I believe the only two things which I did *not* do, were the ascent of Mont Blanc, and making acquaintance with the German gaming-tables.

Both experiences I knew to be considered orthodox for the young Englishman abroad ; but perhaps my tastes were peculiar. The first feat had been attempted too often, and accomplished too seldom, to prove a temptation to me ; added to which, those who had tried it, successfully or otherwise, had talked so much on the subject that they had drained it of all novelty ; and to abstain from the second phase of " fast life " (which might more appropriately be termed " fast death ") I con-

sidered as part fulfilment of my dying father's injunction not to soil his name.

But at the end of the two years I began to feel home-sick. As far as my own establishment was concerned, I had not much, it is true, to draw me thither ; but I longed to see Grasslands again, and my sisters' faces, and to take up my position in the world as my father's son. So I made up my mind to return ; abruptly at the last, as was my nature, and bent my steps homewards, taking Paris on my way. There I found my mother and sister still very comfortable, and apparently without any present intention of moving. I stayed with them a few days, and was astonished at the different tone their conversation had assumed to what I remembered it at Guildford. The vanities of this wicked world appeared to be influencing not only Lady Mary's dress, but her tastes and manners. She was as eager now about society and amusement as she had once been opposed to both ; and she was permitting Lilius to receive the attentions of a certain Mons. Le Sage—a gentleman, I allow—a “vicomte,” of course—but a Roman Catholic into the bargain ; and when I ventured to suggest that a marriage between persons of opposite faith was not likely to be productive of much happiness, my argument was met by as long a string of refutations as my objections to the round-faced curate in the days of old had been. Leaving my mother, therefore, to the pursuance of her new opinions, and my sister to her prospective conjugal bliss with Mons. le Vicomte, I took my departure from Paris, charged with their love and a box of bonbons for Marguerite, but not a word of regret for their lengthy separation, or a wish expressed that they might soon meet again.

I arrived in London about Easter, and the first house I went to was that of Lord Portsdowne, whose family had just come to town for the season. The welcome I received was as hearty as I could have desired. I found my uncle and aunt but little changed ; and my cousins, Lady Mary and Lady Cecilia Lascelles, transformed into elegant, fashionable women, but not too much so to object to my resuming the brotherly terms upon which I had met them from the time I was a boy.

Before I had been there ten minutes,

“Sit down, Gerald,” exclaimed my uncle, pointing to a chair contiguous to his own, “and tell me exactly what you wish—

hope—and intend to do. Of course you will keep on the house in Brook Street.”

The residence in question had been taken on a lease of twenty-one years, more than half of which time had still to run. It had been let during my absence, but was again vacant, and, after a short visit to Grasslands, I intended to return to London and superintend its being put in order for my reception.

“If I am to write,” I said, “I must have a house to myself; and as long as the Talbots will consent to look after Grasslands for me I shall live chiefly in town. I should not like to let the old place to strangers, but I could not reign there in solitary grandeur.”

“I suppose you know that Mr Jabez Estcourt has sold Wiversdale.”

“Has he indeed? what did it fetch?”

“One hundred thousand; a long price, but it was worth it. Hawkins, the great City grocer, purchased, and has doubtless decorated it after his own taste. But I was surprised at your uncle not settling there himself, particularly as the name of Estcourt has long ranked with those of the county families.”

“It is a pity,” I observed; “but I suppose the country is too dull to suit his ideas, and he has taken up a gorgeous residence nearer town. Where does he live now?”

“In the same little cottage at Richmond,” replied Lord Portsdowne, laughing at my astonishment; “there’ll be a good lump of money for some one at his death, Gerald, eh? perhaps it will come to you after all, my boy!”

“To *me*?” I exclaimed, with unaffected incredulity. “No, uncle, the mountains will be moved into the sea first. But I shall run down to Richmond and visit the old gentleman as soon as I have leisure. There is an honesty about uncle Jabez which I cannot help liking, notwithstanding the crust that envelopes his nature. He is certainly not a flatterer, but at the same time, I feel I could trust him never to do a mean or dirty action. His character seems to me like that of my father, without the frank geniality which rendered the latter so universal a favourite, and which a man of the world knows it politic in some measure to display, whether he feels it or not. I think there’s a great deal of good hid under my old uncle’s crustiness, although perhaps few would believe it.”

"There's no accounting for tastes," said Lord Portsdowne, shortly.

I slept but one night beneath his hospitable roof, and then I went down to Grasslands and found all there well and happy. Emmeline had recovered much of her former looks; Marguerite, though no stronger, was beaming with content and good humour, and Talbot, with the aid of my bailiff, had been looking after the farm in first-rate style, and had a long balance entered to my credit in his formidable ledger. I fancied there was a look of relief on the face of poor Marguerite when I told her there was little chance of Lady Mary returning to England; but she accepted her bonbons with thankfulness, and expressed no regret at their not being accompanied by a letter. My sisters both made great outcry when I announced my intention of living in Brook Street, and declared that it was my bounden duty to stop at Grasslands and look after the calving of the cows and the ploughing of the turnip-fields; but I replied that they had done all that so admirably for me that I could not think of taking it out of their hands just yet.

"But don't flatter yourself that you will have got rid of me altogether, Emmy," I continued, "when I leave this for town: for I intend to bear down upon you at all sorts of times; whenever I want a breath of fresh air, in fact; and as soon as the season is over, you may expect to see me for three months at least."

They were good enough to say that they should anticipate nothing more than the close of the season, and so I left them, and stayed with the Lyndons in Curzon Street until my own house was ready for me.

Time appeared to have had no effect whatever upon my sister Gertrude, unless, indeed, in rendering her prettier and more charming than ever. She was one of those little graceful women with *piquante* faces who never look matronly, but flit about like girls until at some remote period age drops suddenly on them, and steadies them into placid unwrinkled old ladies. She had a nursery full of waxen little dolls, whom she dressed very nicely and kissed very much, but affection for whom never kept her giddy self from one drive in the Park or evening at the Opera. Gertrude was, in fact, a most thorough flirt; but withal so open and free from any intention

of evil, that I, although her brother, felt no right to blame her, particularly as her husband appeared to approve of all her goings on. My brother-in-law, Horace Lyndon, was a quiet, good-tempered fellow, not wanting in sense, but a very different stamp of man from his vivacious brothers, and his wife's multifarious flirtations seemed rather a source of amusement to him than otherwise.

"I wouldn't be an unfortunate boy like that poor young Henderson," he said to me one day, "to come under the battery of Gerty's glances during my first season for anything. She'll drag him about after her for a couple of months like a puppy with a chain, and when she meets him next year she'll have forgotten all about him in company with a dozen others. Ha ! ha ! ha !"

"Don't you think that Gertrude is rather thoughtless?" I remarked to my uncle shortly afterwards. "If I had a wife, I shouldn't like her to appear day after day in company with the same men, as she does. I know she means no harm, but I am surprised Lyndon does not object to it."

"My dear Gerald," he replied, "*there's safety in numbers*; always remember that. People are very apt to judge with harshness the woman who flirts promiscuously; but they only evince their ignorance of human nature by doing so. If a husband wants cause for being jealous, let him look behind his doors and in his coal-cellars, not among the men who lean over his wife in his presence, and tell her she is the most charming creature they ever met. My son is a sensible fellow, who will never ruin his domestic happiness for a mere puff of wind, and Gertrude is too wise a girl not to appreciate his goodness. I am not in the least afraid for my daughter-in-law; so don't you take alarm for your sister. Depend upon it, Lyndon is quite able to take care of her and himself too."

Before I had taken possession of the house in Brook Street, decided of what servants my establishment should be composed, and settled myself in my father's vacant chair, Beatrice arrived in town for the season, and George and Jack Lascelles met at their father's for the same purpose. Thus I was surrounded by all my own friends, and launched at once into a course of gaiety from which I should have found it very difficult to extricate myself. I had intended, as soon as I was again settled in England, to apply myself seriously to my

writing. I had collected all the materials for my novel, sketched out the plot, decided on the situations, and had nothing to do but to compose the story. But to steadily pursue a sedentary occupation on my first reappearance in town was a harder task than I had calculated upon. However great my own desire, my friends would not permit me to sit still for an hour at a time.

I had scarcely settled myself to my work perhaps, reckoning on a clear afternoon, when I would hear the sound of the hall bell, followed by either the announcement that visitors awaited me in the drawing-room, or the noisy footsteps of Jack or George as they flew upstairs to drag me by main force from my sanctum, and insist upon my accompanying them wherever their restless spirits dictated. At last I gave up the attempt in despair, and decided that "the season" was *not* the time for writing, especially the first season which I had spent in England for years.

"Of course not, old boy!" as Jack remarked, when I confided my difficulty to him. "The season's the time for dinners and '*wines*,' and, by-the-by, when are you going to give us another?"

I had not been long in Brook Street before my little dinners and suppers began to be noted amongst the bachelors of my acquaintance, and I had acquaintances of all sorts. Old friends of my father's came to see me continually, and made me welcome amongst them in a manner which I felt bound to repay; members of my family also, having apparently dropped the recollection of any little disagreement which may have existed between us, (an event which gave me no less pleasure than surprise,) reminded me of their existence by calling in Brook Street, and congratulating me on my return to England. Amongst the latter, astonishment one day almost startled me out of my civility, as I recognised Thomas Logan, but his manner was so cordial, that I could not, without direct rudeness, have refused to ignore the untoward circumstances under which we parted. His presence could never be productive of other than unpleasant recollections to me; but when I asked him to dinner, in company with Joshua Estcourt and several others, he accepted the invitation so eagerly that I began to think that perhaps I had, after all, misjudged him. I found that he was living with his family at Sydenham, and

before we parted, he asked me to visit them there. "If ever you want a puff of fresh air, you know, Estcourt, there you have it, and my mother will always give you a shake-down if you like to come. Don't forget the address,—Madeline Villa, Percival Road, Sydenham,—dinner at six,—and any day that suits yourself will be convenient to us."

If this proffer of friendship on the part of Thomas Logan surprised me, what must I have felt upon reaching home, one afternoon, to hear that Mrs Logan awaited me in the drawing-room. The thought of my aunt Anne had prevented me from acceding at once to my cousin's proposal, for I could not forget the words in which she had spoken of my father and myself, yet here she was patiently resting upon one of my easy-chairs until I should be pleased to make my appearance; and, if not transformed into a very affectionate aunt, at least much changed from what she had been.

"I have come to scold you," she said, as I shook hands with her, "for not having done as Tom asked you, and been to see us at Sydenham. Your sisters, Gerald, are such *very fine* ladies that I can hardly expect them to do me the honour of a call; but as your name is Estcourt, and you have not yet married into the aristocracy, perhaps you will not carry your head too high to acknowledge your father's nearest relations."

I assured her of what was true, that it had never been my wish to do so; and that if a want of cordiality existed on either side, it had certainly not originated with our branch of the family. I believed that my sisters held aloof from their relatives simply because their company never appeared welcome to them, and that they only required an assurance that it was so, to be ready, not only to visit at their houses, but to receive them at their own. I spoke quietly, but I could not evince much interest in the subject, because it so little affected me. I was willing to bury the hatchet, and pass over all that had gone before, but I could not pretend to myself that I had forgotten it; if the insults had been levelled at me, instead of my father and mother, the case might have been different. Mrs Logan sniffed in her old manner as I concluded, and changed the subject by commenting upon the furniture and fitting-up of the apartment.

"There is surely a smell of tobacco here, Gerald!" she

said, using her nose for the purpose of detection; "but I hope you don't permit smoking to go on with those beautiful curtains.

I laughed, and said that I was afraid my friends did just what they pleased in my apartments, and were not much in the habit of taking the beauty of my curtains, or any other article in my possession, into consideration. Mine was quite a bachelor's establishment. I was not used to the honour of a lady's presence in my room, or the knowledge might make us all more careful. I feared I had no untainted apartment into which to ask her, but I trusted she would excuse the fact, and in future I must be the one to pay my *devoirs* at Sydenham. This I said, hoping it would be a hint to her not to intrude upon my privacy again. But she appeared impervious to a suggestion.

"Oh! I don't mind it," she replied. "I was thinking of the furniture, Gerald, not of myself; and very far from keeping me away from Brook Street, I dare say I shall often pop in upon you about luncheon time. When business brings me up to town, it is generally to the West End; and I find it so convenient to have a friend to go to, and particularly in such a central situation. Have you lunched yet? What's your usual hour?"

I never took luncheon myself, but, of course, I told my aunt that she could always have it at any hour she chose; and, as business afterwards appeared to bring her up to London pretty often, I had quite as much of her company as I desired. It is true that I did not always force myself to join her midday meal: sometimes I was engaged when she "popped" in upon me; sometimes, being a lazy fellow, not out of bed; but my presence or absence seemed to make no difference to my aunt Anne. She always made very good use of the permission I had extended her, and from all accounts appeared to enjoy an excellent appetite.

The rest of my family flocked about me, the younger members especially, and I both entertained, and was entertained by, their fathers and mothers. My uncle William and Mr Logan were the only two who kept aloof from me. Of these, one was openly quarrelsome, the other silently sulky. I met the former at the table of my uncle Jabez, and encountered so much insolence at his hands, that I told him publicly that

I would never sit down to dinner with him again, at which outburst his elder brother grunted, but expressed no sign of either disapprobation or approval, although he continued to send me an occasional invitation to his cottage at Richmond; the moods of the latter, on the contrary, were beneath my notice, further than by keeping me away from Sydenham, as they did. This, then, was the condition in which I now found myself with respect to my relations. I never felt much in my element when mixing with them; they were not to me like the Lascelles and my immediate friends; but we were always friendly and social upon meeting, and I did not stop to inquire whether they or myself derived most benefit from the intercourse. My sisters laughed, and prophesied that their new regard was not quite disinterested, and would last just as long as was convenient to themselves, an opinion which I was always ready to meet with a lengthy dissertation on the folly and wickedness of trying to keep up dissension between persons so nearly connected by blood. I was conceited enough to believe that my father's family had really discovered something in myself to conquer their uncalled-for dislike; simple enough never to suspect that my improved condition and increased influence were at the bottom of their unsought proffers of friendship, and that the same jealousy they had displayed towards their lucky brother, was smouldering beneath the honey of their words to me, and only requiring an occasion to light up into a flame. The social position which I now occupied was undoubtedly a good one. I was a member of three of the best clubs in London, hand-in-glove with many young men of the highest families, the possessor of a very pretty stable, and of an uncommonly good cellar. I made my cousins welcome to a share of all my good things; they borrowed my horses, drank my wine, and made use of my purse whenever they had cause for doing so, and I acceded to their requests, glad of an opportunity to lay them under an obligation which should make them feel the close connexion between us. Thus, surrounded by flatterers as well as friends, cursed with a long purse, a short age, and a spirit of incorrigible thoughtlessness, I began life on my own account under as great disadvantages as a man could. Young fellows, with limited allowances or moderate pay, are apt to speak of the independent and rich of their acquaintance as "deuced lucky," but it

would be more correct were they to reverse their opinion. A necessity for labour is the best heritage a father can leave his son, and a little wealth a most dangerous thing. The command of mine led me, not into extravagance, for my desires were moderate, and it covered them, but into idleness, which is the root of all evil, and left me space to run into every description of folly. Contrary to the experience of most men, I had been kept from much of this abroad, chiefly for the reason that I moved about so rapidly, that I had no time to make familiar acquaintance in the towns I passed through. I had been perfectly happy and contented, however, with the life I led, had felt no lack of excitement, and sighed for nothing better; the novelty of foreign travel having kept me from missing the dissipation usual to my age. But now that I had been reintroduced to such scenes, I marvelled that I could have existed away from them so long; that I could have given up, for two whole years, of my own free choice, the delights which awaited me in England. Consequently, I plunged into them headlong. I have no wish to excite feminine interest by writing myself down a desperate rake at this or any period of my life.

I was not such. I was simply what all other young men who mix in the world are—thoughtless, ready for any amusement, and fonder of running about by night than by day. I lived in two worlds. One was when I rode in the Park by the side of some highborn creature on horseback, or grazed my animal's legs against the wheels of a carriage wherein reposed the portly form of a dowager at whose house I had spent the previous evening, and where I had made my appearance redolent of *Ess. Bouquet*, in embroidered shirt and infinitesimal necktie, to dance until the small hours with the prettiest girls of the season; or to lean over their chairs at the Opera, and whisper nonsense under cover of the music, whilst they held their fans before their mouths, and turned their eyes upwards, as they murmured their half-reproachful, half-approving answers. The other world—when I rushed off, at the conclusion of the aforesaid opera or ball, with companions of similar taste, into an atmosphere which made it of little consequence whether I was scented with one of *Rimmel's* distillations or the essence of tobacco; and into the presence of

women, from whose recognition by daylight I should have fled as from a pestilence.

The incongruity of such an existence used often to strike me forcibly. Holding the hand of some pure girl in the dance; pouring my abominable balderdash into her ears; and receiving, perhaps, some little modest token in return, that proved I was at least not obnoxious to her—the thought would suddenly flash into my mind, what would she think, say, and feel, if she only knew the scenes from which I had freshly come, the conversation I had heard, the company I had mixed with? And the idea would have sufficient power to make me retreat within myself, put an end to my compliments, and perhaps cause a shade of disappointment to steal over the face of my fair partner as she tried in vain to elicit the cause of the change. My male friends had many a hearty laugh at what they termed my absurd scrupulosity; but though they checked my confidences towards themselves, they never eradicated the opinion from my mind, that a man should belong to one world or to the other; and that, if low company, low haunts, and low conversation are adequate to afford him satisfaction, he has no right to mix amongst those to whom the thought of such scenes alone is contamination. These are new ideas, perhaps, to emanate from a man's pen; I do not say that I acted up to this doctrine; I simply affirm that my heart upheld it, and that the persuasion rendered me less free in the society of well-born women than I should otherwise have been. I never alluded before them to the influence which beauty is supposed to exercise over the rougher portion of mankind, but I felt as if their glances were intended to search into my soul, and question why, since their charms possessed so much power, they were not sufficient for my pleasure, and the pleasure of such as myself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TEMPTATION AND A FALL.

BEATRICE was very anxious that Emmeline should come to town for part of the season ; and knowing that she would not care to stay in so gay a house as her own, tried to persuade me to invite her to Brook Street. But this I refused to do. I excused my conduct to my sister on the ground that the presence of a lady in my establishment would prove an obstacle to all my bachelor entertainments, and that I was pledged too deeply to put a stop to them ; but my real reason was very different. It would have given me greater uneasiness to see Emmeline accept, for any length of time, the hospitality of either Beatrice or Gertrude, and mix in the continual round of gaiety which was their life.

I had sounded her on the subject ; I knew that she was perfectly contented down at Grasslands with her husband and child, and had no wish to enter into the dissipations of which she heard so much. I loved to think of her in her happiness and innocence, engaged in teaching little Ethel, or riding round the farm with Talbot, or reading aloud to Marguerite ; and to know that whenever I was sick to death of the turmoil which surrounded me, I had but to run down to Grasslands to breathe a purer atmosphere, physical and moral.

Was it all selfishness in me to wish to keep my sister untainted by the frivolities of a London season ; to preserve the freshness of her heart, the simplicity of her nature, the activity of her love, in its full force ?

Emmeline had always appeared to me something better than the rest of us ; and not to me only : my father, although he had been as proud as Lucifer of the beauty of the other two, had felt the loss of neither of them so long as she was with him in his sickness ; and my mother, however bitter the mention of her titled sons-in-law made her, had never a word to say against this gentlest of her daughters or the husband

of her choice. Beatrice and Gertrude were not less pure by nature than their sister ; but the education of their maturity had brushed all the bloom from their minds, whilst she retained the guilelessness of hers. Emmeline would have listened with the greatest complacency to a story which would have dyed the cheeks of Beatrice with scarlet, and caused Gertrude to purse up her mouth to a degree of fabulous minuteness, whilst the tell-tale flash from her eyes revealed that she understood the *double entendre* which it was intended to convey. In fact, my elder sisters were women of the world ; they had been often deceived where they had trusted, and mistaken where they believed, and the consequence was that, in judging others, they were no longer apt to err upon the softer side. Emmeline had gone almost from the altar to the backwoods, and had never had an opportunity since her marriage of becoming polluted by the society of women worse than herself. For here leaks out the secret of many a pure girl's initiation into the knowledge of wrong. Few men would be base enough to teach it her ; they are too soiled themselves not to reverence innocence when they see it ; and the first endeavour of a true-hearted man is to preserve it, even mentally, to the woman he admires ; besides, they have not the opportunities of the other sex. It is from women, women who go through society, frequenting the best houses, receiving the most honoured of their sex, shaking hands with the youngest and the purest, but who know only too well that were the secrets of all hearts to be revealed, their path would lie beyond the pale, that our sisters and our daughters receive their most dangerous lessons.

“ I hold that man the worst of public foes,
 Who, either for his own or children's sakes,
 To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
 Whom he knows false abide and rule the house :
 For, being through his cowardice allow'd
 Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
 She like a new disease, unknown to men,
 Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd.”

From such companions I was only too glad to think that Emmeline was preserved, and I strenuously opposed all the efforts of her sisters to entice her to take up her temporary

residence amongst us. She wrote to me frequently, and every letter proved how perfectly happy she was in her country life, and how circumstances, which most people would have thought trivial, had the power to make her heart well over with innocent pleasure. Now it was that Ethel had had her first riding-lesson on the miniature pony which I had picked up for her, and looked so pretty in her little habit and tasselled cap, (photograph in costume enclosed by fond mother,) and had not been at all frightened; then, that Marguerite's new invalid chair, by which she could be drawn out into the garden, suited admirably, and did not jolt her in the least, even over the gravel; anon, because a commission, with which Talbot had entrusted me, had come to hand, and was "perfect, just what we wanted; and you really are the dearest boy not to mind trouble," &c. &c.

In fact, to please Emmeline it was but necessary to remember other people: however gratified she might appear at receiving a present for herself, it never called forth corresponding thanks. One day she wrote, enclosing a letter which had arrived for me at Grasslands: "a suspicious enclosure," as she impertinently called it, "and not looking at all as if it had come from a gentleman." I took up the forwarded communication and examined it; it certainly *did* look suspicious, being written on thin pink paper with lines running across it, enclosed in a long envelope, and directed in an uncertain female hand. My curiosity was roused to ascertain who could have addressed me at Grasslands, a place from which I had been absent for two years, and to which I had only returned on a flying visit; and my first glance at the inside of the missive helped me little.

"5 Belleville Crescent, Marlborough Circus, Islington."

"Who the devil can live at Belleville Crescent, Marlborough Circus, Islington?" I inwardly ejaculated, and turning to the scratchy signature I saw transcribed what I took for "A. Shannon." The name was quite unfamiliar to me; but I was used to receiving appeals for the loan of small sums from that half of the creation which no man can refuse; and so I concluded with a sigh, that I was "in" for another five-pound note, and returned to the commencement of the letter:—

"5 Belleville Crescent,
"Marlborough Circus, Islington.

"DEAR SIR,

"Hearing that you have returned to Grasslands, mamma desires me to write, and beg, that if not troubling too much, you will have the goodness to call at the above address, as Mrs Sherman" ("Grasslands, Sherman," I mentally exclaimed, "Good heavens! what can the people want with me?" and then the remembrance of my plantation wooings dawned upon my mind, and I began to laugh so heartily that it was some minutes before I could proceed with the epistle of my fair correspondent)—"as Mrs Sherman has something of yours by her, and would wish to make a communication respecting it in person. If you should be coming to London shortly, any day will be convenient to mamma, as she never goes out, having enjoyed bad health since Mr Sherman treated her so badly, going to Amerika with all our things and leaving us alone, Adelaide being married some time ago. Hoping this will find you well,

"Yours sincerely,

"J. SHERMAN."

The little Julia, of course; how could I have forgotten her? and yet, when I came to think of it, I had forgotten her entirely. The miserable event which had followed so quickly on my last interview with the family, and the stirring, active life which I had since led, had effectually obliterated all memory of the blue-eyed girls with whom I had frittered away so many half-hours; not only that, but the various scenes of excitement through which I had passed since that time, and the crowds of pretty women I had seen and made love to, had expurgated all desire to meet my country fascinator again.

My first impulse upon finishing Miss Julia's letter was to take no notice of it: I was not at Grasslands, and she might imagine it had never reached me: but on further consideration I abandoned the idea as unmanly. I was aided to this resolve by the knowledge that the bullet-headed gentleman with the creamy voice had deserted them; if he had been in Belleville Crescent no earthly power should have dragged me there, I disliked the remembrance of him too much; but the thought of the women being alone, and probably in distress,

robbed my assent to their request of half the repugnance I felt in the prospect of fulfilling it. Besides, I was curious to know what property of mine could possibly have fallen into Mrs Sherman's hands, and what she could have to say on the subject which might not be written : these considerations, mingled with a revived recollection of how pretty Julia had been at seventeen, and how, in all probability, she would be much more so at her present age, made me decide to drive over to Islington the first afternoon I could spare time to do so. I had really no feelings connected with the enterprise beyond a little curiosity, and a spark of that chivalry which I trust will never cease to be kindled in my breast at the call of any woman, be her age or station what it may.

At the same time I made no secret of my proposed visit to the men of my acquaintance ; there was nothing in Julia Sherman's letter to render showing it a breach of confidence, and I usually produced it, after having given the history of my double flirtation, as evidence of my good faith, challenging my bachelor friends to do the business for me, and go as my ambassador to Mrs Sherman's *levée*. Many and many a time did I put off the expedition, my indifference on the subject making me believe that it was really necessary for me to be in the opposite direction ; and when at last, some ten days after the receipt of the note, I jumped into my cab with the sole intention of going to Belleville Crescent, I thought it about as great a nuisance as anything that I had ever done. I do not relate my feelings on this matter as any extenuation for the events which followed it : I simply note down what occurred. I am now approaching an epoch in my existence which I would gladly not record ; but were I to shirk doing so, I should not only be an unfaithful biographer, but in endeavouring to hide some of my faults, I should be concealing the only excuse which I have for the committal of others, which if not worse in themselves, had the most fatal effect upon the happiness of my life. I will attempt to relate this part of my history as briefly as possible ; and should any of my readers be inclined to assert that it had been best omitted, I would ask them to suspend their judgment until they have seen how intimately it affected each subsequent action of my life, and trust me that if it had not been absolutely necessary, the story should never have been told.

Belleville Crescent was a row of not bad-looking houses, each of which appeared to be inhabited by several families; for as my cab stopped at No. 3, a monthly nurse (as I saw by the card in the window) popped out her head from the dining-room, three children with dirty faces peered from the area, and a man with lathered chin and razor held in hand glanced over a tumbled blind from one of the top stories. What is called, in lodging-house parlance, the "drawing-room floor" was the only window unoccupied, and there I concluded I should find the people I was in search of. I was rather nervous as I knocked at the door, lest the surrounding neighbours should suspect me, as they did Pecksniff, of having come post-haste for the monthly nurse, and nearly fell back from the steps when I found that she had answered my summons.

"It's not Mrs Baines you're wanting, sir?" she inquired, in the mildest of voices, and totally unlike the determined accents of the famous Gamp.

"No; a Mrs Sherman,—does she live here?"

"On the drawing-room floor, sir; one above this. You had better step up; the lady don't move about much."

I "stepped up" accordingly, and knocked at the door, which was answered by an invitation to enter. When I did so I found Mrs Sherman alone, extended on a sofa. I have never been able, from that day to this, to ascertain if she was really ill, or only shamming; but I strongly suspect it was a little of the latter mixed with a spice of laziness. She had always been a nerveless, indolent woman, and since the defection of her husband had taken credit for being in too delicate health to make any exertion, and been well satisfied to lie on the sofa all day, and be supported by her daughter. So much I discovered for myself; the rest of their history Mrs Sherman now related to me. Her tale was a long-drawn-out and pitiful one, to which I had to listen with looks of forced interest, and such ejaculatory sentences as "Indeed!" "I am very grieved to hear it!" "How shocking!" "How very sad!" &c., wishing all the while that either the daughter would make her appearance, or the mother would stop her whining.

But Julia was not at home, and Mrs Sherman whined on. They had been so comfortably settled at Grasslands, and Mr Sherman was doing so good a business amongst the surrounding gentry, when one day, without so much as by your leave,

or with your leave, he had gone away to "the Americas," taking everything of value in the house, "even to the pretty trinkets you gave my dear girls, Mr Estcourt, and which they valued above everything they possessed."

"And have you never heard from your husband since, Mrs Sherman?" I inquired.

"*Never*, sir, and I trust I never shall—it's a painful subject—we have reasons to believe that Mr S. was not quite unaccompanied in his flight"—and here Mrs Sherman looked down, and fingered the strings of her cap.

I said I was very sorry to hear it, and then an awkward silence ensued, until I remarked—

"And so Adelaide is married, Mrs Sherman." A faint flush rose to the woman's faded cheek as she answered hesitatingly, "Yes, she is married, Mr Estcourt."

"Well, I trust."

"Yes, very well. Her gentleman is a wealthy person residing in the country, but I have not seen my daughter now for some time."

"And Julia is with you still?"

"Oh, yes; I couldn't part with Julia. She is employed out during the day in a large millinery establishment at the West End. Nothing ungenteel, Mr Estcourt; I couldn't allow my daughter to take any but the genteelest employment. Her only business is in the fitting-on room, where a figure like hers can be turned to advantage. I expect her home shortly; she is generally in by six."

"And your business with me, Mrs Sherman? We must not forget that, for I am rather pressed for time."

"Oh, you won't refuse to sit a minute, surely. Mr Estcourt. The last evening we had the pleasure of seeing you in Dorsetshire Terrace" (ay, and the first, too, I thought to myself) "you were so obliging as to commission the late Mr S. (for I cannot bring myself to speak of that bad man as if he lived) to paint you a picture of the Hall; and he took the greatest of trouble, I believe, to comply with your wishes, but when it was finished you had left England, when of course it could not be sent after you. That picture I have by me now; for his paintings were the only things which Mr Sherman left behind him, being too bulky, I presume, to be of any use to him. Of course, Mr Estcourt, you need not purchase the picture unless

you choose ; still, a commission is a commission, sir, and I think it would hang nicely on your walls at Grasslands. But that is for you to decide."

Of course I said I should be only too happy to pay for the possession of the work of art, and desired Mrs Sherman to let me know at once how much I was in her debt. She wished me to examine the painting first, but this I felt to be quite unnecessary, particularly as it was packed away in a loft, and could not be procured until Julia came home. All that I wished was to cancel the obligation I was under, and she could send the picture to Brook Street at her convenience. After a good deal of "humming" and "hawing," and saying she must leave the price to me, and I could give just what I pleased, &c., and that she would have been happy to present me with the painting as a remembrance of Grasslands, if the late Mr S. had not left Julia and herself to their own resources, Mrs Sherman settled the knotty question by naming the modest sum of ten pounds for a work which, if placed on a signboard, had not fetched one, and for which my servant subsequently, on being desired to hang it up in his pantry, almost gave warning. However, ten pounds was not much to me ; and before the words had hardly left Mrs Sherman's lips, a note for that amount was transferred from my purse to hers. She then became so profuse in her thanks that I was meditating instant flight, when a light footstep on the stairs was followed by the entrance of Julia. As I rose to greet her, I was astonished at the improvement in her appearance. She had grown taller and slighter ; and the rusticity of her beauty had given place to an air of positive refinement. Her eyes were as blue and as big as ever, her hair as flaxen and luxuriant ; and, whether from the heat of the afternoon or the little excitement consequent on finding me in Belleville Crescent, her cheeks were flushed to the soft tinge of rose-leaves.

She was stylishly dressed also, as became a young "lady" from a West-End millinery establishment, and the attire set off her face as well as her figure. I found her exceedingly shy, however ; her bashfulness appeared so great that she could hardly answer my inquiries for blushing, and yet she contrived to imbue me with the idea that to meet me again had been the first object of her life. I did not stay long after her arrival, as I had engagements nearer home ; but as I

gathered up the reins of my cab-horse, rather impatient at the number of strange eyes which were watching my departure, a flutter of the curtain on the drawing-room floor incited me to give another glance upwards, when I caught the eyes of Julia Sherman apparently fixed upon me. As soon as I moved my head, however, she retreated in confusion, and in another minute I was whirling off to the West End. As I recall this part of my life, I turn over the contents of an *escritoire*, and there, amongst faded ribbons, withered flowers, mateless gloves, and old *billets-doux*, I find the following little notes, the first of which reached me two days after my visit to Islington :—

“ June 24th.

“ I must write to thank you for your great goodness to us. I did not know it when I met you yesterday, or I should not have been able to hold my tongue quiet. Mamma desires me to say that we send the picture to-day to the address which you left us, and she hopes you will like it. It is just like the *dear* Hall, but I suppose you have forgotten all about that—I mean the time when you and I was there together.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ JULIA SHERMAN.”

(2.)

“ June 30th.

“ DEAR MR ESTCOURT,

“ You never wrote to say if the picture arrived quite safely—it went by Parcels Delivery. Perhaps you do not wish to write to me, now that you are such a rich gentleman, and such a great difference between us. If so, it would have been best if we had never seen you again. But I dare say you have so many friends that you have no time to think of mamma or me.

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ JULIA SHERMAN.”

To this note I returned a short answer, acknowledging the receipt of the picture, and denying that anything but press of business had prevented my doing so before. By return of post arrived the following :—

(3.)

“ July 1st.

“ Why do you write so cold? You used always to call me

Juli, and now I am only Miss Sherman. Is it anything I have done or you have heard of me that has changed you? Or is it because papa has behaved so disgraceful to us? Anyway it seems hard to me; I had a good cry over your letter of last night.

“Yours affectionately,

“JULIA.”

And a week later:—

(4.)

“July 8th.

“I have been expecting a letter from you every day. You are *very* cruel. What has poor Juli done that it is too much trouble even to write to her? Have you forgotten all our walks and talks at Grasslands? I wish I had—but I cannot do it, and I shall never be happy again all my life—I wish I was dead.—JULIA.”

I had been thinking of writing to her again, until the last note reached me, and then I decided it would be folly to do so. The girl was evidently half educated and wholly foolish; and I should only be the means of dragging us both into a scrape if I pandered to her romantic nonsense. So I was stoically silent under a perfect battery of little love-letters, breathing nothing but reproach, which Julia Sherman fired at me day after day; until one morning, when I received an excited letter from her, entreating me to go to their aid, as the bailiffs had been put into their rooms for debt, and every article of furniture was about to be seized from under them. I went off to Belleville Crescent at once, and released them from their difficulty; and notwithstanding all my virtuous inclinations, I cannot say that I was displeased with the effusive demonstrations of gratitude displayed by Julia for my benefit. She clung to me and hung about me in a manner which would have been very delightful for any man, and especially for one who wrote himself down heart-whole.

“You’ll come again,” she whispered, as I prepared to leave them; “you will not desert us, will you?” and although the very atmosphere of Belleville Crescent was obnoxious to me, I could not but make a half-promise to comply with her request. I did not redeem it, however, notwithstanding that

the battery of notes was again opened upon me, and their language became more and more unmistakeable.

I was not in the habit of using my own horses at night, and one evening, as I turned out of Brook Street, about eight o'clock, in search of a cab, to my intense surprise, I ran up against Julia Sherman, who was loitering on the pavement, outside my house.

"Good heavens, Julia!" I exclaimed, "what are you doing here? You're a great deal too pretty, my dear girl, to go about in the evenings by yourself. Who are you waiting for?"

"I was only looking at the house," she answered. "Oh, Mr Estcourt, you are so unkind to me, you never answer my letters; you are breaking my heart"—and at this juncture she commenced to cry, and there was nothing to be done but to call a cab, and take her home. On the way I believe I tried to philosophise a little, and to reason her out of her fancy for me. I know that, however flattered I may have felt by her avowed preference, I thought the whole affair great folly, and foresaw that it might end in trouble for both of us. But there are very few men whose vanity is proof against a woman's confession of love, whether real or feigned. I fear we often are most utterly defeated when we imagine we have just conquered. I tried to play the Mentor to Julia Sherman; to point out to her how utterly futile it would be for us to love each other; to make her understand (however much the effort cost myself) that on account of my position I should be forced to look elsewhere for a wife. I salved over the harshest part of my plain speaking, by telling her how flattered I felt by her affection, and how little I was worthy of it; with many other such commonplaces, which, if not strictly true, I should have been a brute not to make use of. Still, though I spoke out boldly, and meant each word I said, I was not yet four-and-twenty, and it was a hard task for me to feel the girl's arms clinging round me in the shelter of the cab, and to hear her continuous sobbing, without attempting some more practical comfort than mere words could convey. But so far I take credit to myself. I seemed to foreknow what would eventually come upon us both, and feared to take a single step which should anticipate my fate. So I parted with Julia Sherman with a pressure of the hand, and an assurance, in

answer to her whispered entreaty, that nothing had passed but what had raised her in my eyes—God forgive me!

I have promised to be brief, and I will fulfil my word. My philosophical lecture had not the effect upon Miss Sherman that I anticipated. I continued to meet her at times and in places when I least expected to do so, and I continued to receive periodically from her pen torrents of reproaches and upbraidings for my cruelty and coldness of heart. Still, I was firm in defending her from the danger which she courted, until one day, regardless of appearance, she rushed into my rooms in Brook Street, clothed in deep mourning, and throwing herself at my feet, declared, amidst sobs, that her mother was dead; her poor dear mother had gone from her for ever; and that she had no money and no credit, and no one to look to but myself in all the world. Shocked at her statements and display of grief, I hastened to raise her from the attitude she had assumed, and assure her of my sympathy and willing aid.

“But what had become of her engagement at the West End,” I inquired. The pay which had been sufficient to support two would of course suffice for one. But Miss Sherman informed me that that was another of her misfortunes. A letter, one of her letters,—she said with becoming hesitation,—had been seen and read, and thereupon she had received a summary dismissal from the head of the establishment.

“It was a note I should not have left about,” she added timidly: “I can’t think how it happened; it must have dropped from the bosom of my dress: it was—in fact it was yours, Mr Estcourt, and Miss Grindlay said she would have no one about her place who received letters from gentlemen. And so I lost my situation, and I don’t suppose she will give me a character, and—and—I’m ruined by it,” she said, relapsing into a fresh burst of tears.

Of course I was indignant; the fact of the mere possession of a letter (and especially a letter of my own, which had been preserved for weeks, and carried next to the heart of its recipient) proving the cause of so summary a dismissal was an unheard-of case. I considered Miss Grindlay’s conduct unjustifiable—in fact, infamous. I was for going post-haste to the millinery establishment itself, and engaging in a “round” with its worthy proprietress. But this design Miss Sherman

begged me to forego. It would be of no use, she averred, and only the cause of further humiliation to herself. I tried to comfort her with the assurance that situations were not so difficult to procure ; that a little influence went a long way ; and that I would spare neither money nor pains to get her another. But my proposal did not meet with the approval I anticipated. "I cannot toil on alone," she said plaintively ; "it was all very well whilst my dear mother was spared to me ; there was some object in working : but now everything is so sadly changed. It is not a week since I buried her, and I have managed, by the sale of our effects, to pay everything she owed, as well as the funeral expenses ; but now that is over, I have no heart for any further effort."

I suggested something about her married sister being able to receive her, but she refuted the idea with scorn.

"Adelaide and I have not spoken for ever so long," she said ; "I would die sooner than apply to her."

"But how are you to live, Julia !" I asked with unaffected curiosity.

"I don't know," she replied, "and I don't care : go to the workhouse, I suppose, or die in the streets : it will be all one to me, unless,"—and here she turned her large blue eyes full upon me—"unless, Mr Estcourt, you will let me stay here."

Whether it pleased or no, her proposal startled me, and I spent a whole hour trying to reason her out of the idea. I represented to her plainly how dire the consequences of such a proceeding must prove, not for myself, but for her : I promised to support her in comfort and respectability if she would only consent so to live ; to be her friend till death if she would not urge me to take advantage of her friendlessness. But my words of wisdom were all lost upon her : her eyes streamed with tears : her hands were alternately clasped and clenched : she played off all the persuasive graces of woman when she implores ; all the pretty pantomime of woman when she is slighted ; until she and a very powerful feeling called Vanity (of which I have ever had too much to be a hero) gained the day. In one word, Julia Sherman threw herself upon my protection, and from that hour lived under it.

Stern moralists will doubtless blame the action, but I was not a moralist at that period, and I saw no other course open

to me. If I had loved the girl, it might have served as a palliative for the deed ; but if I had loved her, I most assuredly should never have accepted her offer, and I believed that the shelter afforded her by my roof, at least, left Julia Sherman no excuse to join the God-forsaken thousands who roam our city every night. But let no one mistake the case for one of heartless seduction.

From that worst of venial errors which, ruthlessly culling all the blooming promise of a young life, leaves nothing but blasted and arid plains behind, I hold myself, both in deed and purpose, entirely free.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DISCOVERY AND A SURPRISE.

Two circumstances, occurring before the close of the season, were subjects of great annoyance to me. The first was my discovery that the issue of the events related in the last chapter had become patent, heaven knows how, to my sisters Beatrice and Gertrude.

“Oh ! yes, Master Gerald !” exclaimed the latter one day, with a would-be mysterious air, “*we* know the reason that you wouldn’t invite poor Emmy to stay with you in Brook Street. You are determined to prevent your sisters ever taking you by surprise, that’s very clear ; only I think you might have thought of a less expensive method for effectually barricading your fortress against the presence of ladies.”

“What do you mean ?” I said, although I had already guessed it from her manner ; “you are welcome to come to Brook Street whenever you choose ; there is no reason that you should not do so,” (as indeed there was not.) But her words had discomposed me, and I felt that I changed colour.

“Just listen to Gerald, Beatrice,” continued my vivacious sister ; “he invites us to lunch with him in Brook Street to-morrow ; will you be one of the party ?”

Beatrice looked up from her work in solemn surprise, and regarded me fixedly.

"Is this true, Gerald?"

"True! what are you driving at?" I said testily.

"That we can go to see you in Brook Street."

"Of course! what is to hinder you?"

"Only that we heard that you had increased your establishment more than is absolutely necessary for your requirements," and she bent her eyes again upon her work as she concluded.

"Well, then, you've heard wrong," I rejoined hotly; "I keep no more servants than are wanted for the size of the house."

"And you are incurring no needless expenses elsewhere, I hope?" she continued quietly. I was terribly tempted to swear, but I only answered—

"What possible concern can that be of yours, Beatrice?"

"It's no good being angry about it, my dear boy," she replied. "I do not expect you to be different from other people, only I do trust you will be careful, and not become entangled in any way. I am a dozen years older than you are, remember, and I've seen a good deal of the world; so I feel I have a right to caution you. These little affairs are all very well in their way, I suppose, as long as they don't go too far, but many a man has been ruined by them before now. I am very glad, however, to hear that you have had the sense not to spoil the letting of the house in Brook Street."

As my sister proceeded thus calmly, I was standing at one of the windows, with my back towards her, chafing under her warning, biting my lips, changing my feet, and wondering who the devil could have enlightened her in this manner as to my private affairs. Her voice ceased, and the mocking tones of Gertrude next took up the strain.

"Look at him, Beatrice, staring out of the window; he dare not look us in the face. Isn't he the picture of a naughty boy? Ah! you think we know *nothing*, Master Jerry; we poor women have no eyes or ears, have we? or sense either, for the matter of that; but we make the best use of what heaven has given us, at all events."

"Think!" I exclaimed angrily, leaving my position by the window—"I think you are *all* eyes and *all* ears, and hear and see a great deal more than ever takes place. Pray, who told you this confounded story about my doings in Brook Street?"

"It was repeated to us in confidence," replied Beatrice, gently.

"Now! was he in a rage because he was found out, the dear old poppet!" said Gertrude, shaking her head in the most provoking manner; "and did he think his sisters were going to give up their authority to be torn in pieces by an angry British lion?"

"Gertrude, for God's sake, do try to talk sense. Beatrice, I must beg you won't repeat any of this folly down at Grasslands; Emmeline is not quite so *au fait* at discussing scandal as you and Gerty are, and I might not be able to enter on an explanation with her."

"Which you have done with us most fully," interposed Gertrude, who did not like the rebuke I had given her.

"I do not see that Gerald is in the least bound to give us an explanation, Gerty," remarked my elder sister, "and I think you were foolish to introduce the subject. As you had done so, I felt tempted to give him a little caution, but I am very sorry if I have offended him. Do not let us say any more about it, Jerry; of course it is no business of ours."

"I should think not," I answered bluntly; but I felt that the discussion left me at a disadvantage, and that they knew almost as much about me as I did myself.

The other event to which I have alluded, as causing me annoyance, took place but two days before I left town for Grasslands. I had been to a large pic-nic at Richmond, which was to end with a dance; but I contracted such a violent headache from the combined effects of a glaring sun and inferior champagne, that I decided not to wait for the evening's amusement, and found my way home by myself. As I strolled along a street not far from the one in which my house was situated, I came suddenly upon the figure of—Mrs Sherman. I had so thoroughly believed in the death of this woman—placed such confidence in her daughter's accounts of her illness, her painful demise, and the expenses of her funeral, that her appearance was really like a resurrection from the dead to me. At first I could hardly speak to her, and her only desire seemed to be to elude my notice; but in a moment all the deceit which had been practised on me flashed on my mind, and I grasped her unwilling arm.

"What are you doing here?" I exclaimed. "Is it by your

design, or Julia's, that she has represented you to me as dead—that she has represented herself to be left without a friend or a home ? ”

She trembled so violently that she could not answer me, and I was so indignant that I would not give her time to collect herself.

“ Wretched woman,” I said, “ it is not possible that you can have pandered to your daughter's disgrace ! Come back with me ; I must confront you with one another. I will have a full explanation of this before we part.”

The scene which ensued was a miserable one. The women accused each other of being the originator of the scheme, of which I certainly now appeared to be the victim ; the daughter, of course, excused her assent, and all the consequent falsehoods, on the score of her love for myself ; the mother pleaded her utter inability to control Julia when she had once set her heart upon a thing, and the upshot of their arguments proved nothing but that I had been regularly duped, and I began to doubt whether the feelings had not been assumed as well as the pretence for their indulgence. Disgusted with the whole affair, I peremptorily dismissed Mrs Sherman, forbidding her to appear under any roof for the rent of which I was liable, or to hold any communication (under present circumstances) with her daughter. She whined fearfully at my decree, saying it was very hard she should be entirely parted from her child, and that she had often told Julia that poverty was no evil so long as it was accompanied by virtue ; and to think that Mr S. should have deserted her, and her dear girls into the bargain, and that she was left to die alone. This was all very pathetic, but I was firm. I could not help regarding the part this woman must have played in the farce acted for my benefit as infinitely worse than that of her daughter. I felt no pity for her, no compassion ; the very sight of her faded, hypocritical face was repugnant to me ; and if Julia had insisted upon being allowed to see her mother, I should have sent them both forth together.

But this little episode made me decide to leave town earlier than I had originally intended. I had received invitations to pass the autumn months at the country houses of Lord Portsdowne, the Lyndons, and the Claremonts ; but an irresistible impulse took me down to Grasslands. I was sick and wearied

of the artificial life by which I was surrounded, and longed to breathe a less demoralising atmosphere ; and as the train bore me every minute further from the dusty, smoke-dried town, into the green heart of Dorsetshire, I felt a new man. The sight of the apple-orchards by which we rushed, their trees weighed to the ground with rosy wealth ; of the various dells, sunless and cool, with a carpet of fallen cones, from which graceful ferns and nodding foxgloves upreared their verdant heads ; of the wide-spreading pastures, scattered over with grazing cattle ; appealed to my senses as it had never done before. The freshness and the quiet of the country struck me, for the first time, as something necessary to my enjoyment ; and as Emmeline drove me home from the station in her little basket carriage, I leaned back, quite at my ease, and thought how pleasant it would be to be driven through shady lanes and past cowslip-scented meadows for ever. The air was laden with sweet smells, the breath of cows, the hedges full of honeysuckle and wild roses ; the fields of rich grass or waving corn, all seemed to add their *quota* to the general fragrance, until a languid, dreamy influence stole over me, and Emmeline taxed me with want of communicativeness.

"Here have we been separated for more than three months, Gerald, and you have not a word to tell me of all you have been about."

"My dear child," I answered, "that is just what I have come down here to forget. Pray drop the subject of bricks and mortar altogether, and let us talk of nothing but buttercups and daisies during my stay at Grasslands. Tell me all about Marguerite and Ethel, the pigs, the stock and the poultry ; but if you want information about operas, or balls, or dinner parties, appeal to Beatrice or Gertrude, for I'm sick of every one of them. Figuratively speaking, I've brought down my slippers with me, and don't intend to put on my dress boots till I go back again."

But although I was most anxious to keep thus quiet, the kindness of those families which had ranked themselves amongst my father's friends would not permit me to carry out my intention : and day after day Emmy would laughingly display the cards which had been left upon me during my rambles, by the gentlemen of the various *ménages*, maliciously triumphing in the knowledge that I should be forced into

society whether I would or no. One evening, on the return of Talbot and myself from a long ride across country, she came dancing into the hall to meet us, with six visiting cards held aloft in her hand.

"See!" she exclaimed, "what an honour you have brought upon us! The county member and his family, who have never thought of calling upon Colonel and Mrs Talbot, bear down in full force as the master of Grasslands makes his appearance. Here they all are, Gerald. Lady Grafton, Sir Phillimore Grafton, Miss Grafton, Miss Ellen Grafton, Mr Eustace Grafton, and two extra cards from the gentlemen for your especial benefit. What do you think of that? Oh! you naughty boy, don't swear!"

I am afraid there was some cause for Emmeline's last injunction. It was infinitely annoying to me, when I had calculated on a few months' perfect freedom, to find I was not my own master, but must stay to consider, before I laid a plan, whether courtesy did not demand my riding ten miles in one direction, or fifteen in the other, to return the formal call of people for whose acquaintance I had not the least desire. Sir Phillimore Grafton had succeeded my father as member for Dorsetshire, and lived at a place called Lee, which lay between Grasslands and Wiversdale, and where in due course, in company with my sister, I returned the civility he had paid us, and found the family pleasant and hospitable, but old-fashioned. Sir Phillimore looked more like a respectable farmer than a member of Parliament, and Lady Grafton was a helpmeet for him; the daughters were amiable but commonplace, the sons the same; and altogether I decided that one visit to Lee would suffice me a lifetime, though my sister voted me very uncharitable, and declared she had found them charming.

I reminded her that one man's meat is often another man's poison; but she maintained it was the morning call which had disgusted me; that I should have displayed a much better temper after stretching my legs under Sir Phillimore's mahogany, and tasting his crusty old port; that the only thing men ever cared for was a good dinner; and she believed all my talk about buttercups and daisies was sheer affectation.

I bore her reproaches in the spirit of martyrdom with which I was ever used to submit myself to my petty tyrants, even

tacitly consenting to be written down a *gourmand* ; notwithstanding which Mrs Talbot had a great deal of trouble, about ten days afterwards, in making me agree to send an answer in the affirmative to an invitation to dinner which had arrived for us all from Lady Grafton.

"My *dear* Emmeline," I remember saying on that occasion, "I positively can *not* undergo a whole evening at Lee. Just fancy to yourself what it will be, with the old man twaddling at the dinner-table, and the old woman twaddling upstairs; and 'She wore a wreath of roses' from one of the Miss Graftons, and then a drive of seven miles home at ten o'clock."

My sister burst out laughing at the pathos of my description.

"Well ! you won't hear them all at once, Jerry, and if you are with the old man at the dinner-table, it is certain you cannot be with the old woman upstairs ; she will fall to my share. Besides, there will doubtless be other company ; and they seem such kind people that I dare say they have got up this party chiefly on your account ; what do you say, Walter ?" (this to her husband.)

But Talbot would not commit himself by an opinion. He only shook his head and laughed.

"If you and Gerald go, Emmy, my dear, I'll go too ; and if you stay at home, why—I think I shall stay at home."

"Oh ! you stupid old thing !" exclaimed his wife ; "I believe you are secretly in league with Gerald, and will strengthen him in his persuasion as soon as my back is turned, so I shall not leave him until he has decided what answer I am to send to Lady Grafton."

"Now, Emmy, what will be the use of going ?" I asked, commencing to argue the matter.

"What will be the use of *not* going ?" she said in return.

"There will be several uses, or rather gains. In the first place, comfort ; in the second, a good pipe."

"Selfish, of course ! but cannot you have a cigar there ?"

"Thirdly, quiet ; fourthly, freedom from the obligation of making oneself agreeable."

"An obligation which I expect you find rather difficult to put in force," interposed my sister pertly.

"Fifthly"—I was continuing, when she laid her hand on my mouth.

"Fifthly—you are just like all other men, and won't do as you are asked."

"Well! let me hear your arguments in favour of an opposite decision!"

"Sir Phillimore was a friend of papa's."

"That's one white ball for your side, I allow."

"The old people are as kind as can be; and the Miss Graftons are very nice, and will most likely improve on acquaintance."

"Humph!—I can't quite agree with you there."

"I dare say you'll get a much better dinner than I shall give you at home."

"I am afraid that consideration would not weigh with me much, Emmy, notwithstanding you are so certain that an Englishman cares for nothing but his meals."

"Well! you may meet your fate there."

At this I could not restrain myself from laughing.

"My *fate*, you simpleton! I am my own fate, and were I not, I don't think I should seek her at Sir Phillimore Grafton's. However, I suppose this all means that I must go, whether I wish it or not; so you can write and accept for us all."

Emmeline said I was a "darling," and would be rewarded for my virtue. I considered my assent in the light of a great weakness, and was only consoled by the idea that even country dinner parties did not last for ever.

At one time it seemed as if my reward had come before my sacrifice, for I was very nearly prevented from going altogether. On the afternoon of the day we were engaged to Lee, Emmeline and I had just returned from a stroll in the garden, when she slipped on the steps which led to the hall-door and strained her ankle. It was not a serious accident, and one which a few days' rest would probably set to rights, but she could not put her foot to the ground that evening, which of course precluded all idea of her going out to dinner. Talbot, who of late years had quite given up the habit of going into society, and who appeared only too pleased to get off the present engagement, immediately expressed his intention of staying with his wife, and I thought it an admirable opportunity for displaying my fraternal affection by remaining at home also. The face of

Emmeline, when we announced to her our joint determination, was a study.

"What! *both* of you?" she exclaimed, looking from one to the other in positive distress. "Oh! this will never do! What would the Graftons think? You could not make a greater fuss if I were dangerously ill. Pray go, Walter; Marguerite and I will be capital company for each other, and I shall retire early to bed."

"My dear, I could not think of such a thing," replied Talbot, with comical gravity.

"And my anxiety is too great to permit of my leaving home," I added, with equal solemnity.

"Now Gerald is only houcussing you, Emmy," said my brother-in-law, exposing my little weakness with needless severity. "There is no earthly reason why *he* should not go to Lee, but my case is very different."

"There is no reason why you should not both go," replied my sister, decidedly; "but one of you certainly must, and it ought to be Gerald: he knows we were only asked because of himself."

I protested, and argued, and even entreated without any avail: Emmeline was firm in declaring that her sprained ankle had nothing whatever to do with my engagement to the Graftons, and for the honour of the family I was bound to keep it. *La langue des femmes est leur épée, et elles ne la laissent pas rouiller.* As usual in such cases, when my adversary was of the softer sex, I went to the wall, and proved amenable. Talbot was a tougher subject; all his wife's eloquence was wasted on him; and at seven o'clock I alighted at the seat of Sir Phillimore Grafton, alone. The company, a larger one than I had anticipated meeting, was already assembled when I arrived, and as I made apologies for the non-appearance of my sister and her husband, Lady Grafton's lamentations over Emmeline's accident were heard all over the room.

"Dear, dear, Mr Estcourt, you don't mean to say so—strained her ankle? how very distressing! Sir Phillimore, you will be grieved to hear we are not to have the pleasure of Colonel and Mrs Talbot's company to-night. Dear Mrs Talbot has hurt her ankle" (everybody was "dear" with Lady Grafton after the first interview). "How did it happen, Mr Estcourt? Slipped on the steps, you say? dear! dear!

Poor thing, what a sad occurrence ! I hope you sent for medical assistance. Did your dear sister assume the recumbent posture at once ? Ah ! that was right ! but I am truly sorry it should have happened ; we were quite looking forward to meeting her again. This makes our second *contretemps* to-night. A dear young friend staying in the house has been suddenly attacked with pains in the head, and will be unable to join us at dinner, though I trust she may do so afterwards. Yes, so very distressing, you know, and so unexpected. Sings charmingly, but I am almost afraid we shall not hear her this evening : too great a tax perhaps—yes ; such a sad disappointment for all. Quite ready, Sir Phillimore : Mr Estcourt, will you take down my eldest daughter ?”

Laden with Miss Grafton, (who certainly seemed very good-natured, if talking of nothing but Emmeline's ankle during the whole of dinner-time could be taken in proof of the fact,) I wended my way down the broad old-fashioned staircase of Lee, and into the sombrely-furnished dining-room, where the courses were as heavy as the plate, and the conversation as slow as the movements of the antiquated servants. Trying to escape from Emmeline's ankle, which I had worn to the very bone, my eyes wandered up and down the long damask-covered table in order to find out of what stamp of people my feeding neighbours were composed. I saw at a glance they were just such as I might have expected to meet at the Graftons. Clergymen and their wives ; rollicking country gentlemen ; dowdy country spinsters ; with here and there a solemn-looking youngster, or a raw-looking girl, to whom such dissipation were evidently few and far between, and invested with due awe.

I tried to talk and make myself agreeable to Miss Grafton, but she had not been to town that season ; and each familiar topic fell still-born from my mouth, whilst my sister's ankle invariably rose from its ashes, and a few more interesting particulars were extracted from me on that subject. I fear relief must almost have been depicted on my countenance as at last the ladies left the dining-room, and I drew my chair up to the table, and attempted to break the ice which had hitherto existed between myself and the man who sat next me. He was a frank, pleasant fellow of the name of Townshend, who proved to have been well known to my father ; and, in making his acquaintance, I recovered my

spirits, and ceased to remember how I had been bored. Sir Phillimore Grafton conducted his after-dinner parties in the old-fashioned way, pledging his guests separately, and inducing them by every means in his power to sit long, and not to spare the wine. Most of the men then present were such as readily responded to his invitation : and having no inducement to do otherwise, I remained with them until they proposed an adjournment. It was past ten o'clock before we went upstairs ; as we did so, the sound of singing was heard from the drawing-room, which consisted of two apartments, in the further of which was placed the piano. I entered the front one, and throwing myself on a chair by the side of my friend Miss Grafton, composed myself to silence until the song should be concluded. The singer was hid from my sight ; but I was immediately attracted by the voice : a soft, rich contralto, without one harsh or rugged tone, in which the simple, native notes were being sung.

"Who is singing?" I demanded, in a low whisper, of Miss Grafton.

"A friend of ours," she returned, with the same caution. "She was not at the dinner-table. She has been ill."

I then remembered the circumstance related to me by my hostess on my arrival, and concluded this lady must be the one she had mentioned.

"Her voice does not sound as if she were ill," I remarked.

"No ; her head is better now."

"May I ask her name?"

"Mrs Penryhn."

Hitherto our conversation had been conducted in the discreetest of whispers, but at this communication of Miss Grafton's I repeated aloud—

"*What* name did you say?"

"Mrs Saville Penryhn : she was a Miss Rivers. She is an old friend of ours ; we were at school together in Paris."

"Is her husband here?" I demanded, quickly. A strange sensation was beginning to creep over me, and my voice sounded thick in my own ears. Miss Grafton's round eyes opened to their widest.

"Her husband, Mr Estcourt ? oh dear, no ! she is a widow. Mr Penryhn died more than a year ago."

Starting from my seat with a rapidity which, if she thought

at all upon the subject, must have greatly astonished my amiable informant, I pressed forward to the curtained arch which divided the two apartments, and gazed once more upon the face of her who had been Ada Rivers.

CHAPTER XX.

AN OLD SCAR BECOMES A FRESH WOUND.

AFTER a lapse of three years, during which I had been endeavouring to persuade myself that I had forgotten her! She had ceased singing, but was still seated at the piano, robed in a high white dress of some very thin material, the simplicity of which at once struck me; and as she sat with the full light upon her face, she appeared so little changed that Time melted into Nothingness, and there was a music in my ears as of summer waves breaking upon a shore of shingles. A film passed before my eyes as I gazed upon her; a tremulous action long unknown to me seemed to communicate itself to every nerve; above the confusion of tongues, and the wild drawing-room applause, I could have counted the beating of my heart. Had I ever experienced such feelings before? Yes, once, and once only; years and years ago; at a little place called Freshwave; when I loved. By the very novelty of the almost forgotten sensation, I felt that, since we parted, no woman had had the power to stir me thus. Was the agitation I experienced at sight of her but the ghost of the powerful feeling I had conquered, invoked by a recollection of the past, or was it the enemy himself, who had been subdued but not annihilated, and now rose up to warn me of my danger? Scarcely had I had time, however, to feel surprise at the fact that her presence made me tremble, when she left the instrument and moved towards the spot where I was standing. As she advanced, she caught my eyes fixed upon her, and by the vivid blush which dyed her cheek, I saw that I was recognised.

"Am I quite forgotten, Mrs Penryhn?" I stammered, as we met.

"Oh, no; not at all," she answered, hurriedly; and as she placed her hand in mine, her eyes for a moment flashed upon me, and then sought the ground; "that is, you have not been long in England, have you?"

"Only a few months. I returned last April."

"Indeed!" With apparent uncertainty she was about to pass on, when she stopped again, and said, formally—

"I hope your sisters and the rest of your family are well."

"Quite so, thank you! I trust you have recovered from your headache."

"Oh, yes," nervously plucking at her glove.

"My dear Ada, you sang *charmingly*," now interposed the voice of Lady Grafton. "I am sure it is exceedingly good of you to have exerted yourself so, and after such a headache as you have had. I hope it will be none the worse for your kindness. Now, will you have a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee? Oh! you must take something after your exertions. Quite a treat, I'm sure, yes. We do not often hear such singing at Lee. Now, do sit down in the easy-chair and rest yourself; you must be quite fatigued, yes. Mr Romsey, Mrs Penryhn will take a glass of water; that bell. Thank you; thank you very much. Yes. We must take care of our dear friend, after all her efforts to amuse us. Mr Clarke, will you fetch a footstool for Mrs Penryhn? Now, my dear Ada, I will hear no objections. I insist upon your resting yourself, or you may have a return of your headache, yes." And trying to look infinitely grateful under the weight of her obligations, Mrs Penryhn suffered herself to be propped up before and behind, and made completely uncomfortable by the pressing attentions of her over-zealous hostess.

In the meanwhile I leaned against the side of the archway, with something very like depression stealing over my spirits. Her vacillating, uncertain manner, so unlike the composure with which she formerly behaved to me; the hurry of her words, which almost amounted to brusqueness, equally puzzled me. Had she an objection to meet me again? was the remembrance of my boldness at our last interview, of my perseverance in addressing her after she had requested me not to do so, unpleasant to her? and did she fear a renewal of attentions

which she had regarded more in the light of an impertinence than an honour? I watched her for some time after she had been seated in state by Lady Grafton, but her head never turned my way by so much as an inch, and my eyes only rested on the delicate line of her slender white throat, and the woven mass of brown hair by which it was surmounted. She was talking in a sufficiently lively manner with the man whom Lady Grafton had called by the name of Romsey, and seemed perfectly free from the nervous hesitation which she had evinced when addressing myself. I felt ruffled at the comparison, and abruptly leaving my position, again took up one by the side of Miss Grafton, who had wandered into the next room.

"What did he die of, Miss Grafton?"

Until she looked up in my face and laughed I had no idea how absurd I was making myself by permitting the train of thought which occupied my mind to burst forth in this manner without any previous explanation.

"Who, which, when, and how, Mr Estcourt?" This was the sole attempt at vivacity ever known to issue from the lips of Miss Grafton, and Townshend told me afterwards that she had heard him say it a minute before.

"I must really beg your pardon," I observed in answer. "I should have premised that I was thinking of Mr Penryhn."

"Did you know him?"

"No; but my father was intimate with her family."

"Then you have met Ada before."

"Yes; some years ago—prior to her marriage."

"How strange that she should not have mentioned it, for she knew you were coming to-night; and she was staying with us when you and Mrs Talbot called the week before last."

"Indeed! but our personal acquaintance is slight, and of so remote a date, that I could scarcely have dared to hope that Mrs Penryhn would remember me." Notwithstanding which assertion I felt stung to the quick by Miss Grafton's innocent revelations.

"And did you not even know that she was a widow?"

"No. I must have been in Spain at the time, when I interested myself very little about what occurred at home."

"He died very suddenly at his shooting-box in Wales. I do not know from what cause. Papa says he was a very im-

prudent young man, and none of us liked him much. I always wondered how Ada could have married him."

"And she has been very disconsolate since, I suppose."

"I don't think so," replied Miss Grafton, smiling. "You know she is a very honest, straightforward girl, and would disdain to use any pretence of feeling. She was very quiet at first, of course, but she seems all right again now. She never cared much about society, though."

"Where is Colonel Rivers living at present?"

"In Scotland, I think. His wife had some property left her there. Perhaps you know he married for the third time just before Ada did. The younger girls are all put to school."

Armed with this further information, I ventured after a while to creep away from the vicinity of Miss Grafton and approach that of Mrs Penryhn. How all things seemed to change as I drew near her! The man Romsey had left her at last, and she was thoughtfully tearing to pieces a little bunch of flowers which she had worn in her waistband.

"How destructive you ladies are," I said, with a view to opening the conversation. She started slightly to find I was so close to her, and smiled as she replied—

"It is mischief found for idle hands to do. There is this excuse for destroying flowers, however, they soon fall to pieces of themselves if we do not help them to do so."

"Do you lay that flattering unction to your soul with regard to all your works of destruction, Mrs Penryhn?"

She looked at me gravely. For the first time since our meeting I obtained a full view of her eyes. How large and clear and soft and womanly they were! And yet I fancied there was something gone from them since I had seen them last; something come into them which had not been there before. Yet the eyes which had gazed over the Channel waters had ever been full of thought.

"I hope I never intentionally destroy anything that is worthy of preservation, Mr Estcourt."

"Not even a memory. Have you then forgotten Fresh-wave? It was a stupid little place, I allow; but I think its very freshness and simplicity entitle it to an occasional thought. I know I often think of it."

Again that vivid blush which had so startled me on her recognition of myself, but it was the only answer she made to

my inquiry. Fearing I had annoyed her by the allusion, I hastened to another subject.

"I hope my little friends Georgie and Flora and Louie are all quite well. Miss Grafton tells me they are at school."

She recovered herself immediately.

"Quite well, thank you, and growing such big girls: Georgina really promises to be very pretty, and we expect she will make quite a sensation on her *début*. I suppose the honour of introducing her will fall on me, for papa has lived almost entirely in Scotland since his marriage."

"And yourself, Mrs Penryhn?"

"I live in London."

"So do I," I answered quickly.

"I thought Lady Grafton told me you had a place near here."

"Yes; but I cannot live in the country all the year round in single blessedness."

"Not married yet, then, Mr Estcourt?" She put the question with an assumption of ignorance, but she was perfectly aware I was not.

"No, Mrs Penryhn, nor likely to be. I was in no hurry to follow your example."

"Why, what would my sisters have done for a *chaperone* else?" she said, trying to turn the conversation lightly; "I shall be a first-rate one now, by the time they come out."

"Shall you? Well, don't send them down to Freshwave, then, for it's a dangerous place; and what is sport to some is death to others. They have a very good proverb in Spain, Mrs Penryhn, *Puerta abierta, al santo tiento*—The open door tempts the saint; and there is little doubt that time and opportunity work more mischief in this world than we can ever prevent by the force of what we call our will. I have had very bitter experience of this in my day."

Before she had space to recover from the confusion into which my words had evidently thrown her, one or two ladies rose from their seats, and in another minute the whole room was astir, and thanks and farewells were being exchanged by the dozen. In the midst of the general *mêlée* I managed to lean over the arm-chair, and say in a low voice:—

"Shall you stay here long?"

"I am engaged to spend the autumn at Lee."

"I am so glad to hear it."

She did not lift her eyes as we parted, but I ventured to press the hand she gave me ever so softly, and I did not think it was withdrawn quicker than it would otherwise have been ; so having at last torn myself away in the midst of a fresh volley of lamentations over Emmeline's ankle on the part of my indefatigable hostess, I threw myself back in the carriage which conveyed me home, with a sigh which sounded much more like a note of content than one of relief.

What were my feelings—my ideas—my wishes on the subject ? I could not tell. I only knew that I had asked this woman for her love three years ago, when she was neither free to give it, nor I to make my choice in marriage ; and that we had met again under completely altered circumstances, with my tastes unchanged, and hers perhaps still to form. How should we act towards one another ? with what intentions should I approach her ? for that my present sense of happiness emanated from the prospect of meeting her again I did not attempt to deny.

It was useless to pretend to search my heart for an answer ; I knew full well, although I could not at once acknowledge, to what my freshly-springing hopes tended. I had believed so thoroughly that I had trodden down my love for Ada Rivers, that if I never experienced so deep a feeling for any other woman, it was impossible the old affection could be revived, that it was sufficient matter for surprise to find myself compelled to acknowledge its undying power directly I was brought again by chance within the range of her influence. Casting my eye backward over the events of the last three years, I should have found it hard work to reckon up all the women I had flirted with ; romanced to ; even imagined I had loved—yet, which of them had excited in me more than a passing desire—a momentary regret ? There was but one woman in the world whose loss had darkened my future ; made life appear worthless to me ; and drawn tears from my eyes in the bitterness of my disappointment ; and that woman I had seen to-night ; still young, still beautiful ; and, better than both, or either, *free*. My pulses quickened at the thought ; my heart leapt ; my blood burned ; I no longer attempted to deceive myself. I knew I loved her ; I knew I had never ceased to love her—that I should never cease to wish her mine.

The knowledge seemed to dawn upon me as on one who

discovers he has been in possession of a treasure without knowing it. I was half wild with delight: the more I thought upon the past, the present, and the future, the more hopeful I became; and when I retired to my bed, it was but to spend a few sleepless hours, dreaming waking dreams of Ada Penryhn; seeing her as she had appeared upon the beach of Freshwave; in the cave at Crompton Bay; under the moonlight in the hotel garden; reviving all my dearest recollections of that hallowed time, and mixing them with a glowing picture of what might yet be; at the contemplation of which my excitement knew no bounds. It is all very well to laugh at the magician Love, but we have good reason to fear his spells, were it only for the power he possesses to force us to make fools of ourselves. Fearful lest I should betray the feelings which held me captive, the next morning found me more than usually uncommunicative. Emmeline had managed to limp down to breakfast, and it required a great amount of perseverance on her part to extract anything but monosyllables from me.

"Now, Gerald, you are too provoking," she at last exclaimed. "You made such a virtue of going to Lee yesterday, that the least thing I expected was to hear you abuse the whole entertainment."

"That would be very ungracious, would it not?" I said.

"Of course it would: I only remarked it was what I expected, but you are mysterious as the unfathomable Sphynx."

"What mystery is it that you wish to unravel?"

"Who did you take down to dinner?"

"Miss Grafton."

"The fat one?"

"I really can't say—it was the eldest."

"Oh! the other has much the most to say for herself; well, what did you have for dinner?"

"My dear Emmy, do you really expect me to give you the whole *carte*? I forgot to learn it by heart."

"You can at least say whether it was a good dinner or a bad one. How many guests were there?"

"About twenty, I should say."

"Any nice girls?"

"No; none that I saw."

"Poor fellow! any young people of any sort?"

"Very few; the company was chiefly composed of old married couples."

"Did they sing after dinner?"

"One lady did."

"Who was she?"

"A Mrs Penryhn."

"Young or old?"

"Rather young."

"Pretty?"

"That's according to taste."

"Sing well?"

"Yes; very fairly."

"What is her husband like?"

"She has none; she is a widow."

"Oh! a widow; fat, fair, and forty, I suppose; has she lots of money, Jerry?"

"I didn't ask her, Emmy."

"Oh dear! how stupid you men are! there is no getting anything out of you."

"Rather, how inquisitive you women are! and what a deal of talking you manage to extract from nothing!"

"Now, do you mean to say that's all you intend to tell me about Lady Grafton's dinner?"

"I have nothing further to tell."

"Then you were not so bored as you anticipated."

"I am not aware what I said to convey that impression."

"Oh, Walter! *do* listen to the way that Gerald is going on," said my sister, teased out of all patience. "I believe that my prophecy came true, and he met his fate in the fat widow; and proposed, and was rejected before the evening was over, and that's the reason he is so cross this morning."

"You've hit the truth at last, Emmy," I said, as I rose and pushed away my chair from the breakfast-table; "so I hope you will rest satisfied with your discovery, and absolve me from any more catechisms. What are you going to do this morning, Talbot? I feel inclined for nothing but a good scamper across country. By Jove! I wish September would make its appearance."

The next two days went very slowly for me. Doubtless they also did so for poor Emmeline, as her strained ankle did not recover itself so quickly as we had anticipated, and con-

tinued to give pain whenever she attempted to put her foot to the ground. On the third morning, as early as I could, I announced at the luncheon-table my intention of riding over to Lee, and leaving my card upon the Graftons.

"The thing *must* be done," I said, affecting to make a virtue of the necessity, "and therefore the sooner it is over the better, particularly as I shall not have much inclination to spend my days dancing after old women when the shooting season has commenced."

But my sister was very urgent that I should wait until she could accompany me.

"My ankle is sure to be well in another day or two, Gerald; indeed it is much better this morning, and scarcely pains me at all; and it is hardly worth while for us to make separate journeys to Lee."

"I can leave your cards for Lady Grafton," I answered, curtly. I was not overpleased at the idea of being deterred from making my visit alone.

"But what occasion is there for any hurry?" asked Emmeline, innocently; "it is not a week since you dined there, and people in the country, and at such a distance, never expect etiquette to be kept up with regard to formal calls."

"I have not been reared in the country, you see."

"But you will wait for me, dear Gerald, won't you? I should so much enjoy going in your company, and I know it can make no difference to you. Or, if you would like it better, I could even drive over by myself and leave your card. I am sure Lady Grafton would excuse any ceremony, and she must know that seven miles is a long distance for a young man to go to make a morning call."

Anathematising my dear sister's innocence and pertinacious desire to save me trouble, I flung myself out of the house on that occasion, in a humour which ill requited her patient affection for myself; and, mounting my horse, rode out of Grasslands without any particular object except to drive away my dissatisfaction. The fact is, I was burning to see Ada Penryhn again: I had thought of little else, night and day, since I had met her; but I was too fearful that the women's wits (never so sharp as in an *affaire du cœur*) would penetrate my secret if I suffered myself, by look or word, to betray my anxiety to revisit Lee. So I rode off disappointed and slightly

sulky, blaming my cowardice in not doing exactly as I felt inclined ; and yet not dreaming of acting in any way which could excite suspicion until I found myself some miles nearer the seat of Sir Phillimore Grafton than I had imagined I could be. Then an irresistible desire took possession of me ; and setting spurs to my horse, I galloped without further thought to Lee, and found myself inquiring if the family was at home, almost before I had made up my mind whether I should call on them or not. The ladies were “in,” however ; and I was shown into an empty drawing-room to await their advent. In a few minutes the servant who had admitted me returned to say that “the young ladies” were in the garden—pointing, as he spoke, to an open French window, through which might be seen a wide-spreading lawn sprinkled over with shady trees—and would I be pleased to join them there ?

I would be pleased : I did not consider it worth while to tell John how much ; and taking up my hat, I prepared to do as he proposed. Before I stepped out, however, upon the gravelled terrace beneath the window, I paused for a moment to contemplate the scene before me ; perhaps, who knows ! to try to regulate a little that rebellious blood which, if I could judge from what I felt, was coursing over my features as though I had been a woman. The garden at Lee was one of those charming plantations which have been in existence for years, and brought to such a state of perfection, that it seems as though there is nothing left to be done which could possibly improve them. The turf was short and thick, and soft as velvet pile ; not a weed ; not a morsel of moss ; not a pebble was permitted to disfigure it from end to end ; and even beneath the ancient mulberry-trees by which the lawn was bordered, and at which Sir Phillimore was wont to grumble as destroying the grass by their vicinity and shade, it seemed to thrive as well as in most open places. Two mighty cedars of Lebanon, like gigantic sentinels, swept it with their branches at either end, and formed its boundary ; and beyond them the eye lost itself in masses of umbrageous vegetation, amongst which rustic seats and benches were placed at intervals. As I gazed from the open window, I caught the sound of laughter from amidst the clustering trees, and glimpses of variously coloured dresses as the wearers moved to and fro, apparently engaged in some out-door amusement. The wafted sounds of

mirth were too tempting to be listened to at such a distance, particularly as I fancied that I could distinguish *her* voice amongst the others ; so leaving the deserted drawing-room, I walked rapidly across the lawn to the spot whence the sounds proceeded, and was soon in the midst of a very merry if not very wise assembly. Lying on a bench surrounding a mulberry-tree, which must have numbered several centuries, with her garden-hat over her eyes, and a book in her hand, was the eldest Miss Grafton, whilst her younger sister was being chased round and round the trunk by a couple of mischievous little nephews. Two nurses, in bright-coloured cotton dresses, which had greatly added to the warmth of the picture from a distance, were seated quietly at work near at hand ; whilst a vacant perambulator, and sundry other articles of infantine use, showed I had hit upon a veritable nursery party. As I came upon them, Miss Grafton could scarcely have evinced more horrified confusion if a shell had suddenly been thrown in her lap.

"Ellen, Ellen !" she exclaimed, leaping off the bench, "here is Mr Estcourt."

"Pray do not let me disturb you," I said, with genuine vexation at creating such a commotion.

"Mr Estcourt must take us as he finds us," interposed a rich sweet voice, which was not that of Ellen Grafton, "and that is more in the character of nurserymaids than anything else."

I turned at the longed-for sound, and saw Ada Penryhn before me. Her light muslin dress was crushed and torn, from the roughness of the children's play ; her tangled hair was half over her face, and half down her back ; and sitting astride on her shoulders, a little foot clasped in either hand, she held an infant of about a twelvemonth old. Flushed, smiling, but eminently graceful, she advanced to meet me.

"I have not a hand to offer you, Mr Estcourt, as you can see. You must shake one of Willie's instead."

Hand or no hand, I would have been well content, might I have stood and gazed at her for ever. She recalled to my mind a sculptured marble by Canova, of a Nymph and Infant Bacchus, which I had met with in my wanderings through Rome.

I knew now why that particular statue had so taken my fancy that I had stood before it, day after day, in silent admiration of its beauty.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LITTLE CHILD.

"PRAY," Mr Estcourt," now interposed the eldest Miss Grafton, "let me have the pleasure of accompanying you back to the house. Mamma would be so vexed if she knew that the servant had given you the trouble to come all the way down here. I am sure that she is at home, and I will find her for you directly, if you will allow me."

I was to be driven back, then, from the shelter of those delightful trees, and the enchantment of the presence I had alone sought, and set down on an anti-macassared chair in a hot drawing-room, to talk puerilities with garrulous old Lady Grafton. The danger was imminent, but emergency quickened my natural powers of invention.

"I am exceedingly obliged to you for the offer," I said, smiling; "but if I am not mistaken it would be lost trouble on your part, for I ascertained that Lady Grafton was not visible before I took the liberty of joining your party."

As I concluded, I glanced towards Mrs Penryhn, and found she was regarding me with slightly elevated eyebrows.

"That is strange," she observed. "Your mother must have left the house since we did, Caroline, for she was knitting in the boudoir when I saw her last."

"Perhaps Lady Grafton had given orders that she did not wish to be disturbed," I suggested, rather uneasily.

"Perhaps so," said Mrs Penryhn, incredulously. The daughters were not sufficiently imaginative to be incredulous. They accepted my statement in good faith, and only remarked that if their mother had gone out, it would only be for a short time, and that if I would kindly wait, I should be sure to see her before I left.

"Are these your little nephews, Miss Grafton?" I asked, thinking we had had enough of the previous subject.

"Yes; they are Charley and Harry Grafton, children of my eldest brother, who is in India. They always come to Lee for their holidays."

"And this is a little brother, I presume," I continued, as I turned towards the infant which Mrs Penryhn carried.

"A little brother!" exclaimed that lady, colouring with indignation. "Why, Mr Estcourt, this is *my own baby*;" and lifting the child from her shoulder, she held him towards me.

I felt I must say something—that I could not remain as if struck dumb by the intelligence, or hurt the mother's feelings by supposed indifference; so I patted the boy's cheek and hand, and observed that he was a very fine fellow—but there I stopped. The news was quite unexpected. I had thought of Ada Rivers as a maiden; I had trained myself to think of Ada Penryhn as a wife; but it had never entered my imagination to dream she was a mother; and it is not too much to say that my first feelings, on the fact being thus rudely presented to me, were those of repugnance, not only to the child, but to herself. I had not had an opportunity of becoming personally jealous of her husband. Saville Penryhn had been to me like a horrible nightmare, or a distressing thought, but I had hardly realised the *man*. I had never seen the two together—they were separate creations in my mind. But here was *his* child, his flesh and blood, born of herself; and at sight of the son the memory of the father rose up like a tangible presence, and I turned away sick at the very thought.

Ada Penryhn seemed to guess my feelings, for she called to the nurse to take her child.

"I think I have had enough of Willie," she said, with a sigh. "He grows heavier every day."

"Ain't he a *beauty*?" exclaimed the nurse, with rapture. "Come, my king, you shall have a ride home in your carriage. See, ma'am, he's kissing his hand to you. There's a prince to kiss his hand to his mamma!"

"He is a darling," said Miss Grafton, covering the child's face with kisses.

"Good-bye, you pretty baby!" came from her sister; whilst the little boys clustered round the perambulator, and continued to incite the infant to go through his paces. The mother alone indulged in no ecstasies over his departure. She gently stroked the dimpled hands which lay outside the apron, and directed the nurse to take him home. I fancied

as she did so that there was a slight tone of disappointment in her voice, but I supposed all women were disappointed if strangers did not admire their offspring as ardently as they did themselves. Conversation seemed to flag a little after the exit of the nurses with Mrs Penryhn's son and heir. The children had run after the perambulator, and the ladies and myself were left alone. The sisters commenced to collect their implements of work and play, in which duty I of course assisted them. Mrs Penryhn was employed in attempting to fasten up her fallen hair; there appeared to be preparations for a general move.

"Allow me to carry those to the house," I said, as I took some baskets from the hand of Miss Grafton.

"Thanks; but it is really a shame to trouble you. We can send a servant to fetch them."

"Caroline, you have left your book on the bench," said Mrs Penryhn, in a languid tone. I flew back to procure it; it was a volume of the "*Quarry of Fate*."

"Perhaps you have seen this before," said one of the sisters, with would-be facetiousness, as I delivered it into her hand.

"But so long ago," I replied, "that I have really almost forgotten it."

"Oh, I am sure that *cannot* be true!" exclaimed Miss Ellen Grafton. "If I had written anything half so charming I should be always reading it over and over again. You will think us dreadful Goths, Mr Estcourt, but really we never saw the '*Quarry of Fate*' until Ada came down here; and then she told us it was the most delightful thing that had ever been written, and lent us her copy to read, the one I have in my hand."

"My dear Ellen," said Mrs Penryhn, "if you *will* repeat my sayings, I wish that you would repeat them correctly. You asked me to recommend you a novel, and I told you that Mr Estcourt's was very natural and entertaining, which I think it is; but I do not remember passing any other opinion on it."

She was evidently anxious that I should not imagine she thought too highly of my first attempt at literature.

"But I found you crying over the third volume in your bedroom one afternoon, Ada," replied her friend, as anxious

to exculpate herself from the charge of exaggeration. Mrs Penryhn coloured, but did not evince any other sign of discomposure.

"Many books have had the power to upset me in that way," she answered, quietly, "particularly such as appear to have been drawn from life. It is very foolish of me, but I am rather too imaginative, and the 'Quarry of Fate' has certainly a very melancholy ending."

"You recognised, then, that it was drawn from life," I said, in a low tone. We had commenced to walk slowly homewards, and the Graftons were a little in advance of ourselves.

"I concluded it was, because the characters are so natural," she answered, evasively.

"You were right. I shall never produce such another book."

"Why not? You should improve with every effort."

"True; but I cannot describe what I have not felt, and I shall never feel so strongly again." There was a slight pause after this sentence, during which Mrs Penryhn looked away from me, and over the fields which stretched beyond the lawn.

"I suppose you are writing now," she said presently.

"I am not, but I intend to do so."

"You have wasted a great deal of time."

The expression "wasted" jarred upon my ear, and I replied that I had been collecting materials during my travels, and gaining an insight into human character, without which it was impossible to write.

"But since you have been at home," she continued.

"Since I have been at home I have been almost entirely in London; and the numbers of friends I had to see, and the press of engagements into which I was forced to enter, prevented my settling down steadily to hard work as I confess I should have done."

"Then you are, I suppose, of what I should call an idle disposition?"

"Scarcely that, Mrs Penryhn, or I hope not," I answered, with some degree of pique. "But regular study demands regular hours, and those are just what it is impossible to keep during the season. A bachelor cannot spend his even-

ings at home, like a married man ; it is not to be expected of him ; and sitting up late is not the best preparation for a morning's work."

"Certainly ; but could you not write in the evenings ?"

"If I did it would come to the same thing in the end. A single man, you see, can't go to bed at nine o'clock, or even eleven ; and the night's fatigue would naturally"—

"Stay, Mr Estcourt. I do not quite follow you. For *can't* should we not rather read *won't* ?"

She looked in my face as though she were quite prepared to argue the subject, and my reply was given with some degree of hesitation.

"I dare say you think so, Mrs Penryhn, but you can have no idea of the loneliness of a bachelor's life. Why, you surely would not have a young fellow sit by himself evening after evening ; it would be enough to drive a man mad ; he couldn't do it."

"He is in fact either too weak or too obstinate to do what scores of women do ; is not that the case ?"

"But women are not surrounded by the same temptations ; their mode of life is so different ; their education has been so distinct."

"We have not the same opportunities for dissipating, I allow, and we may be thankful for it ; but have we not mild temptations of our own wherewith to fritter away the weary hours ? I am speaking from experience ; you forget that I am a lonely woman."

"Forgive me, but it is hard to believe you are not always surrounded by as much brightness as you diffuse."

"Oh ! I am not dull, I can assure you. I have my books and my piano for amusement, and my child to think for and look after. I am never driven to seek pleasure for the mere purpose of killing time."

"Then you think that I ought to work *in* the season as well as out of the season ?"

"I think that if you were in earnest you would not need to ask the question. Work is not only the end of our being, but the greatest blessing we possess."

"What *are* you two talking about ?" exclaimed the youngest Miss Grafton, as she lessened her speed until we had come up with her.

"About something very serious and very practical," replied Mrs Penryhn. "The propriety of work."

"But who ever thought it wasn't proper, my dear?" inquired Miss Ellen, with a stare. "I'm sure it's the greatest comfort one has; whenever I'm tired of reading or playing, I take up my crotchet for five minutes, and you can have no idea what a quantity I have got through, by working at odd times. I finished three anti-macassars last year, just whilst we were waiting in the carriage at shops or people's houses, and now I'm making a counterpane in squares; there are to be one thousand five hundred squares in the piece, and I often do a quarter of one during an afternoon drive. Such nice work it is; so handy to take up, you know, so quickly done."

"Charming?" said Mrs Penryhn, with just half a smile; "but scarcely an occupation for Mr Estcourt."

"Oh! I didn't know you were talking of work for Mr Estcourt; no, I never saw gentlemen do anything of that sort, unless it was cherry-nets. Papa often makes cherry-nets in the winter evenings, but I should scarcely think a young gentleman would have sufficient patience for them, because the twine breaks so often. I wonder to hear you praising needlework, Ada. I am sure you are not very fond of it yourself."

"I know I am not, and therefore when I force myself to do it I am putting in practice the very theory I have been advocating. 'The modern majesty consists in work,' and the hardest work of all is to make our inclinations bend to meet our duty."

Her words were addressed more to myself than to her friends, and as she uttered them we reached the house, and her hand was held out to me as in farewell.

"Are you *going*?" I articulated in a tone of chagrin.

"Yes; I must look after my little boy, and you have to pay your respects to Lady Grafton, who I dare say has *come in again* by this time. Good-bye," and with a bright smile she ran lightly up the staircase.

I wished her "little boy" at the bottom of the sea. As long as that child lives, I thought to myself, there will be no gaining the mother's heart. She is a woman cut out to devote herself to one object to the exclusion of all other interests in life. How little I knew the length and breadth and depth

of her affections ! The Misses Grafton then dragged me in to see their mother, who, strange to say, was discovered fast asleep over her knitting in the identical chair in which they had left her, at which the surprise of both herself and her daughters was extreme.

"How could John have been so foolish, mamma, as to say you were out, and permit Mr Estcourt to toil all the way down to the shrubberies before he had ever looked if you were in the boudoir ? It must have been sheer laziness on his part ; he ought to be spoken to about it ;" and they would have rung for the servant, and rebuked him then and there, if I had not pleaded for him to be excused.

"I dare say I misunderstood his meaning," I said, feeling terribly guilty as I recalled the man's words. "He said the 'young ladies' were in the garden, and I concluded therefore they were the only members of the family who were at home."

"I am sure it is very good of you, Mr Estcourt, to try and take the blame upon yourself," said Lady Grafton, "very good indeed—yes ; but servants are very troublesome and appear to get lazier every day. And so your dear sister is not yet well enough to leave the house ?"

I sat with the old lady for more than half-an-hour, during which time she enlightened me considerably concerning matters connected with Sir Phillimore's ailments, and the parish of Lee, and made me promise that as soon as Emmeline was sufficiently recovered I should bring her over to luncheon with them. Then I took my departure and rode homeward, sensible that I had burdened myself with a promise which I should find very difficult to perform without disclosing that I had paid a visit to the Graftons, but in not mentioning which, there lay still greater danger, as they would be sure, during their next interview, to tax my sister with unkindness in not complying with their wishes. I thought over the best means for avoiding both pitfalls until I reached Grasslands, and fancied at last that I should be able to manage it without detection or having to resort to a subterfuge. Emmeline was so much better that evening that she sat at the dinner table, and fortunately for me, furnished by her own words an opportunity for my communication.

"I am nearly well, you see, Gerald ; I shall certainly be

able to go to Lee the day after to-morrow, so you will not have had very long to wait for me."

"No," I commenced, in rather an awkward manner. "By the way, Emmy, Lady Grafton wants you to take luncheon there, when you do go."

"Take luncheon! Did she tell you to ask me the other night?"

"Confound you!" I exclaimed, turning round quickly to one of the servants. "How many times have I ordered this ice to be broken into smaller pieces? Do you expect me to put *that* into my wine-glass?" And I shoved a block of four inches square so close under his nose that the man started back in horror at the anticipated application, and the ice rolled away on the carpet. Emmeline looked at her husband, as much as to say, "What can have disturbed him?" but her attention was diverted from the question she had put to me, which was all that I required, and a morsel of ice having been found by the agitated domestic which would fit into my wine-glass, tranquillity was restored at the dinner-table.

"Apropos of this luncheon at Lee, Emmy," I resumed, after a pause; "Lady Grafton mentioned it when she was speaking of your injured ankle: she said, 'As soon as your sister is well enough to leave the house, I hope you will bring her over to luncheon with us.' I asked if we should go on any particular day, and she said, no, that they would be happy to see us at any time, and I have no doubt that she included Talbot in the invitation."

"Talbot would much rather be excused," said my brother-in-law, good-humouredly.

"Well, I should like it of all things," exclaimed Emmeline, "and I wonder if I might take Ethel? She would be so pleased to have a game with the little Graftons. You had better not accompany us though, Gerald; I am afraid it will be a great bore to you."

"Oh, no!" I said, carelessly, "I have no objection to make one of the party. I told Lady Grafton I would take you over. Besides, I have"—— I was going to add "*to make a call there*," but conscience rebuked me loudly, and I stopped short.

"To leave your card?" interposed Emmeline, and I was not righteous enough to correct her. "To be sure; but I

thought I might do that for you. However, you could ride there and return directly after luncheon if you like; and, after all, when you come to think of it, it is not such a *very* great imposition."

"By no means," I replied, in a tone of condescension; "I dare say it will be rather pleasant than otherwise."

"You seem to think so," said Emmeline, laughing, and there the matter dropped; and, on the day appointed, we drove over in company with little Ethel to Lee.

"So good of you to come, my dear," said old Lady Grafton to Emmeline, as she received us in the dining-room, where the luncheon table was already spread; "so good of your dear brother to bring you, and so nice of you to think of bringing the dear child. Charley and Harry will be delighted with a little playfellow—yes—and we shall be quite charmed if you will spend the afternoon with us—only sorry that the Colonel did not accompany you—yes! I hope you will not be frightened at finding us alone—quite a family party, you know; we have no one staying at Lee at present except Mrs Penryhn; a dear creature—yes—but a widow, and, of course, very quiet. Ellen, my dear, where is our friend? I am anxious to introduce her to Mrs Talbot."

"She is in the nursery, mamma; she will be down directly."

Emmeline glanced at me with an eye full of humour. The recollection of the widow, "fat, fair, and forty," had just flashed into her mind, and her look seemed to say, "Not only a widow, but with encumbrances, eh, Jerry?" I turned my back upon her, however, and pretended not to understand; I knew that in a few minutes her jesting would be at an end.

A gong sounded, and the servants took up their station in the room.

"Does Mrs Penryhn know that luncheon is served?" demanded Lady Grafton of one of them. The man looked in an inquiring manner at his fellow, and Miss Grafton supplied his want of knowledge.

"She must have heard the gong, mamma; don't wait for her, she never knows when to leave that child."

"Ah! a most devoted mother, and an example to all ladies, though I have no doubt, dear Mrs Talbot, you need none. We will commence without her, then, for I know that

if Willie needs her attention in any way, luncheon will hold a very secondary place in her consideration."

During this little eulogy of Lady Grafton's I avoided another mirthful glance from Emmy's eyes by busying myself in assisting the ladies to take their seats at the table, which being done the meal proceeded; and although I mentally writhed under the fear lest Ada Penryhn might choose to absent herself from it altogether, I was trying to make myself as agreeable as I could to the daughters of the house, when the door of the dining-room was suddenly thrown open, and a start from my sister, who sat opposite to me, so undisguised that it attracted general attention, warned me that the presence I longed for was at hand.

"I am very sorry," said the voice of Mrs Penryhn; "I really did not know that you had company till just now, or I should have been more punctual."

Turning to encounter her, I no longer wondered at my sister's evident surprise. Arrayed in a white muslin robe, made in that charming fashion which flows loose from the shoulders behind, and ornamented with knots of coloured ribbons, she looked as much a girl as she had done on the beach at Freshwave, as, indeed, having but just passed her two-and-twentieth birthday, there was no reason that she should not. But even after she had been introduced to Emmeline, the latter seemed scarcely able to realise that the bright blushing creature before her was the "widow" to whose appearance she had been looking forward with malicious pleasure.

"We did not wait for you, my dear Ada," said the apologetic tones of Lady Grafton, "as we thought you might be occupied with the baby."

"Thank you for not doing so," she answered, as, to my great delight, she accepted the chair next my own. I had trembled with pleasure as she entered the room, and could not help fancying that my sister had observed my emotion. Even as Mrs Penryhn gave me her hand, in the careless, informal manner which indicates that acquaintances do not meet for the second or even third time, I saw Emmy's gaze bent upon us, not impertinently or curiously, but with a serious inquiry which was more difficult to meet than either, and to evade which I began to rattle off as much nonsense

as I have ever been guilty of. After a few minutes, Mrs Penryhn addressed Emmeline.

"I suppose that was your little girl I saw just now in the nursery, Mrs Talbot. She would not tell me her name, but I guessed she had something to do with Grasslands from her resemblance to Mr Estcourt."

"Do you think her like my brother?" said Emmeline, who flattered herself her daughter was the image of Talbot; "we have never seen the likeness ourselves."

Each lady at the table then gave her opinion on the subject, until Ethel had been pronounced to be like everybody in the world except her own progenitors.

"People have such fancies about resemblances," observed Miss Grafton. "Mr Estcourt mistook Ada's baby for a Grafton the day before yesterday, when every one says it is the image of herself."

"Was Gerald here the day before yesterday?" asked Emmeline, quickly.

A moment afterwards, and I am certain she would have bitten out her tongue sooner than put the question, but it was then too late; Lady Grafton and her daughters had already turned upon her.

"Of course, my dear Mrs Talbot. Surely you must know that; why it was then he so kindly promised to bring you over to see us."

"We had a very pleasant afternoon together, had we not, Mr Estcourt?" said Miss Ellen Grafton, laughing, "and discussed the 'Quarry of Fate,' and all sorts of things."

I tried to laugh in return, but my effort was somewhat of a failure. Poor Emmeline, to whose nature anything like deception was so foreign, looked the guilty one as she stammered in reply—

"Oh, yes—of course—so he must have been—how stupid of me to forget!" and then retired into her plate with cheeks of crimson, whilst Ada Penryhn looked from my sister to myself, and from myself to my sister, until she too caught the infection of blushing, and we were all three confused together. Every one felt there had been a mistake made, though no one seemed quite aware who had been the culprit; fortunately for us, however, our hostesses were not sensitively alive to a change of manner, and went on talking in a matter-

of-fact way of the various incidents which had occurred during my last visit, until we all looked as if we had forgotten that a question had been raised relative to the fact of the visit having been paid. Still the tide of general converse did not flow quite so smoothly as it had done before. Emmeline continued to fall into short reveries, during which she looked hard at the salt-cellars, and from which she awakened with a start, and Ada Penryhn became more taciturn, and responded to my small talk in monosyllables. I am sure we were all thankful, and I most of any, when Lady Grafton rose from the luncheon table and proposed that her daughters should conduct my sister round the gardens and conservatories.

"You will excuse an old woman, my dear," she concluded, "who cannot do without her afternoon nap, but if you will accept the girls as escort, I shall be quite lively again by the time you come in to take a cup of coffee with me."

CHAPTER XXII.

PERPLEXED, BUT NOT CAST DOWN.

THE two Miss Graftons each seized an arm of Emmeline in the most impulsive manner, and bore her off in advance. Was it force of will which thus again threw Ada Penryhn and myself together; and if I had been "courting" one of Sir Phillimore's daughters, would the same happy combination of circumstances have chanced to favour me? I do not know, but I remember that things so happened that it seemed perfectly natural that they should so happen, and that neither of us were anxious to alter them for ourselves. So we strolled leisurely along the old garden paths; she with her hat shading her eyes, and her eyes mostly bent upon the ground, I with mine fixed in admiration upon the graceful figure which moved by my side.

"Are you enjoying yourself here, Mrs Penryhn?"

"Yes, very much. You think, I suppose, that because my friends are old-fashioned and dull, and one day at Lee passes

the same as another, that I must be *ennuyée*, and longing for the time when I shall return to Kensington. But it is just the quiet and monotony of such a visit which is enjoyment to me. At home I have everything to think of, and no one to consult, and at times I do get rather wearied of solitude. Now here it is just the contrary ; all care and trouble is lifted off my shoulders ; they nearly kill me with kindness, and I have nothing to do but to rest and to enjoy myself. I always feel so much stronger after a visit to Lee, stronger in every way."

I had not given her by word or look an intimation of the meaning folded in my question, but she had guessed it without such aid, and I did not know which to admire most, her beauty or the quickness of her mental powers.

"How is it that I did not meet you in town this season?" I asked.

"Chiefly, I suppose, because I was not there all the time, and partly because I go out very little. I saw Lady Claremont, however, on several occasions, and I know some other members of your family also."

"Which are they?" I demanded curiously.

"Mr and Mrs Logan, of Sydenham."

"The Logans! Good heavens! how did you come to know them?"

She looked in my face with a comical glance at my surprise.

"In a very ordinary manner. I was introduced to them at the house of a friend, and Mrs Logan called upon me."

"Do you remember that young man who insulted you at Freshwave?" I asked, getting quite hot over the recollection.

"No, not insulted me; that is too harsh a term to use: he only looked in at the windows. Yes, of course I do; he is Mr Thomas Logan; I see him constantly."

"You *see* him! does he *call* upon you?"

She began to laugh at my excitement.

"Sometimes, but please don't be so fierce, Mr Estcourt. I assure you he is wonderfully improved, and has quite left off staring in at the windows."

"It would be the worse for himself if he hadn't," I muttered. "You will allow me the pleasure of calling upon you in Kensington, Mrs Penrylm?"

She bent her head so low, that, try as I would, I could not see her face.

"If I should be there during the season."

"But I am in town both in and out of the season," I replied eagerly. "I live in Brook Street, and only come down to Grasslands for the shooting."

"That is a great pity," she said in return.

"Why so?"

"The owner of a place like Grasslands should live on his property."

"But my brother-in-law, Colonel Talbot, manages all the farm business for me far better than I should do it myself; and he enjoys the work, whilst I should hate it under present circumstances."

"Yes; but there are surely other duties connected with the ownership of an estate besides being one's own bailiff. There are your tenants to become acquainted with and to benefit, and the people whom you employ to look after and influence; no servants work so willingly, or so well, as under the master whom they know to be legally their own. If they see you take no interest in the property, they will begin to take none; and instead of improving with each year, it will deteriorate; whilst you, to whom the charge has been committed, are wasting your time in London. Why did you leave the army?"

"It was my father's wish."

"I am afraid he did not read your character as correctly as I have," she answered, coolly, "or he would have seen that you are very unlikely to do any work which is not forced upon you. I suppose, however, he had little doubt that you would take up your position at Grasslands as one of the county landlords."

"I dare say he had little doubt," I replied, with a degree of acrimony, "that I should marry and have a wife for whose benefit to keep up the establishment. He did not know when he died, Mrs Penryhn, that marriage was the very furthest thought from my heart, and has been ever since;"—"until now," I would have added had I dared. She made no reply to my remark, and we walked a few steps further in silence. Then she said, almost timidly—

"But do you not think, setting the good of Grasslands altogether on one side, that London is a very bad school in

which to win your literary spurs? I can imagine that your feet once fairly set upon the rung of the ladder, place would make little difference to you; but now that the ascent is all before you, and what you write must be of such infinite consequence to your name, surely you cannot live too quietly during the period of composition. I fancy your father must have written his best works at Grasslands, and you acknowledged yourself the other day that London, for you, swarms with temptations to idleness."

"All that you say, Mrs Penryhn, is exceedingly true, and I wish I could follow your advice. But I am afraid there is only one set of circumstances under which I could resign myself to vegetate in the country, and the chance of that is at present very remote."

"And is?"—she inquired.

"Not only marriage, but marriage with the woman I single from the whole world," I answered boldly. "To turn the country into a paradise for me it will need a wife for whom earth holds no peer."

"In fact, such a one as earth holds not at all," she replied, with an attempt at gaiety. "Say at once, Mr Estcourt, that you are wedded to your London life, and are not likely to abandon it."

We had now reached the long line of conservatories, and during their inspection the conversation became more general. Mrs Penryhn deserted my side for that of Emmeline, and the two women discussed floriculture together, and went into mutual raptures over the blossoms by which they were surrounded, whilst I did a mournful tour of duty with the Misses Grafton. But as we emerged from the houses again I blessed them for the alacrity with which they rejoined their new friend, both talking to her at once, and forcing Mrs Penryhn to resign her place in the conversation, and her position on the gravel-path, two losses which I hastened to replace with my own company. We had not gone much further, however, when we came in sight of Master Willie, being wheeled along in state in his perambulator. The nurse stopped as she approached her mistress, and the child held out his arms to his mother.

"May I carry my baby a little way, Mr Estcourt?" she said, in the prettiest and most pleading of manners. Of course

the request made me feel awkward, and I stammered out some inquiry of why she should ask my leave for the occasion. She made no answer at first, but lifting the boy in her arms, directed the nurse to return to the house, and wait for her in the porch. Then, as we recommenced our walk, she said—

“Because you don’t like my baby. I can see that.”

“You are quite mistaken,” I replied, very uncomfortable under the glance she directed towards me. “I am not much of a judge of babies, it is true ; but I should think yours was a very fine little fellow for his age.”

“He is a very *dear* little fellow,” she replied ; “you don’t know what a comfort he is to me. I am sure he understands as well as I do when I am sick or unhappy, don’t you, baby ?” And as she spoke she pressed the little chubby face softly against her own, and my jealous heart began to throb with the same pain it had experienced upon first seeing him.

“Children are such a trouble,” I remarked resentfully ; “they occupy so much time and attention that no one gets any consideration when they are by—else they would be well enough in their way, I suppose.”

“But see how much care they need, Mr Estcourt ; what little tender creatures they are : if their mothers did not look after them, who would ? The Graftons are rather inclined to laugh at me about Willie, and think I make too great a fuss about him ; but they do not know—it is not to every one I would tell—that it is the remembrance of my own neglected childhood that makes me so tender to the child. I am sure he is not spoilt, for he is the best baby possible—still I am sure you do not like him, and I can’t think why.”

This was said with a little pout and air of injury which was very emboldening.

“I am *jealous* of him, Ada.”

She had halted beside a large syringa bush to gather a bunch of blossoms for the child ; something in the tone of my voice, perhaps more than the words I used, arrested her attention, and her arm fell to her side.

I was just about to take her hand, had touched it in fact, when Emmeline came suddenly upon us from the neighbouring bushes, having retraced her steps for the purpose of reminding me of the time. Ada Penryhn was rather rosy, and I dare say I looked conscious ; but if my sister felt any sur-

prise, she did not show it, for, woman-like, her attention was so immediately attracted to the infant, that she almost forgot the errand she had come upon.

"Oh! what a darling fellow, Mrs Penrhyn; is this really your baby? do you think he would come to me? Gerald, dear, do you know it is nearly five, and Lady Grafton is kindly anxious we should take a cup of coffee with her before we go. I ran back from the house to tell you of it. Only thirteen months, Mrs Penryhn, and with twelve teeth? you *ought* to be proud of him: I call him a splendid child! Has he been nursed, or brought up by hand?" And the ladies commenced to walk homewards with their heads close together, and there doubtless ensued a learned disquisition on bottles and baby-jumpers, but from which, being totally excluded, I had no opportunity of taking notes. I returned to the house, a little way behind them, watching all the pretty action of Mrs Penryhn's head as it was shaken in grave dissent or nodded in approval, and wishing to heaven I could talk about babies like Emmeline, if it should procure me one half of the animated looks which fell to her portion as she discussed the treasure and his doings. And the treasure was staring at me the while with wide-open blue eyes over his mother's shoulders; and since this claims to be an honest narration, it is not too much to say, that mentally I shook my fist at him every time I encountered his innocent gaze, and thought what a blessing it would be if some untoward circumstance, over which I had no control, would come and put an end to him altogether. We took coffee with old Lady Grafton, after which we drove to Grasslands, without my having had another opportunity of speaking to Mrs Penryhn alone.

As soon as we were fairly on our way, Emmeline turned to me and said—

"Gerald! is not Mrs Penryhn that Ada Rivers of whom Beatrice used to talk so much?"

"Yes, I believe Beatrice does know her, or used to do so."

"And the daughter of papa's old friend?" continued my sister, as if she had just made a discovery; "why surely you met her at Freshwave, four years ago. Don't you remember our talking of the subject in Brook Street one day at dinner, soon after I returned to England?"

"Confound the women," I thought to myself, as I looked

out of the carriage window, "they circumvent one at every turn. Never do I flatter myself that they have forgotten a thing, or lay a little plot however neatly, but they begin to recall circumstances, and dig up proofs, and lie in wait for signs, and put this and that together, until a man may as well hope to make them believe that black is white as to conceal any mortal fact from their eyes."

"Well, Gerald," said Emmy's cheerful voice, when she had waited some time for a reply, "does it take so long to remember?"

"Whether I met Mrs Penryhn at Freshwave as Miss Rivers? yes, of course I did, in company with dozens of other girls. If I had thought the event possessed any interest for you I should have repeated it before."

"Why didn't you tell me you called at Lee the day before yesterday?"

"Well, I did not leave home with the intention of calling there, and after I had done so, I thought you would think I might as well have waited for you; that is all."

"You silly boy," said my sister; and then she appeared to fall into a reverie from which I roused her.

"What are you dreaming of now, Emmy?"

She turned towards me with the old sweet look, and placed her hand fondly on my shoulder.

"Do you remember the first time you visited Grasslands, Jerry, when I met you at the station and we drove home together through these lanes?"

"To be sure, dear. I can recollect how astonished I was at the magnificence of the carriage and horses and the livery servants, and how pretty I thought my sister Emmeline."

She blushed like a girl at the compliment.

"How old were you then, Gerald?"

"About eleven, I think."

"Thirteen years ago! only fancy what a little fellow you were then."

"And how you spoilt me, Emmy."

"I have always been so much older than you, dear, and yet I feel, comparatively speaking, still so young, that I seem to have forgotten all this while that you have been leaving your boyhood behind you and springing into a man. You were twenty-five last birthday, Gerald."

"Yes, Emmeline ; and if not a man, never likely to be so, I am afraid."

"To be sure—how stupid I have been ! and yet I have always thought of you as a boy."

"Continue to think so of me, Emmy, and to spoil me into the bargain : I like it."

"I shall never do the first again," she said, shaking her head ; "you have opened my eyes, Gerald."

I did not ask her in what way ; but as the carriage stopped at the hall, she told me of her own accord.

"I like her so much, dear !" she whispered, as she put both her arms round my neck and kissed me.

Meanwhile I was not entirely satisfied with my visit to Lee. I did not go near the place for some days afterwards, but stayed at home, brooding over the things which troubled me.

In the first instance I found it very difficult to reconcile myself to the idea of *the baby*. It would be distasteful to me in any case to think that my wife had been the wife of another man, still more so to know that her first-born child could never be mine. Where my feelings were powerfully concerned, I was unfortunately of a very jealous and exacting disposition ; and although I did not wrong Ada Peryhn by fearing she would love this infant better than any she might subsequently give birth to, the fact of his occupying part of the heart I desired to win from her was gall and wormwood to me. These were very bad feelings doubtless, but I do not think they were unnatural. I had loved her from the beginning with an undivided affection, and it damped my ardour in the thought of marrying her, to remember that she could never be so wholly mine as I was hers. I did not take into account that if I had never loved another woman since we parted, it had not been for lack of trying to do so, and that my allegiance was due more to the power of her charms than the excess of my loyalty.

I did not argue with myself that the indulgence of a little innocent affection which God had bestowed upon her, and which not to have requited would have proved her unfit to be the wife of any man, or the mother of any children, must have enlarged instead of contracting the sympathies of her heart ; and that the unlawful though meretricious loves in which I had

wallowed since I had been disappointed of her own, had corrupted mine until the question should rather have been if it was a fit offering for the acceptance of any virtuous woman.

I was about, with all my imperfections on my head, to ask for her unsullied hand in marriage ; and I dared to seriously cavil at, not a spot or flaw in the character of my beloved, which would have seemed as nothing beside the hundreds which defiled my own, but a circumstance which she had not brought upon herself, but which I chose to believe lessened her value as a wife. I had what I called a single heart to give her, which had only frittered away half its energies upon foolish love-makings for which it had not had even the excuse of feeling a real interest, while she had thrown hers, it was true, into the duties which life brought her, as she would doubtless throw it again should need require. However, when I at last argued myself out of the many objections I felt to the existence of little Willie, it was not by reason of any such conviction as the above. For one day I bore up manfully against the miserable idea that he would prove so serious an obstacle to my prospective comfort, that I might even have to give up my hopes of winning his mother: by the second I had magnanimously resolved that if Ada Penryhn loved me I had no right to destroy her happiness for the sake of a child who might not live to be a man, [and I am afraid the probable contingency had not much power to trouble me ;] and by the time I had been parted from her for three days, I was longing so much for another glimpse of her face that I determined I would marry her at an hour's notice, if she had twelve children instead of one. Having disposed of this matter, however, another yet remained. I still felt piqued when I recalled the manner in which Mrs Penryhn had spoken of myself. She had set me down as of an idle disposition ; as unlikely to do any work but what was forced upon me ; had said plainly that my duty was to live at Grasslands, fattening my stock, and writing my novels ; and had mentioned the life I led in London in tones of unmistakable contempt.

If this was her unfeigned opinion, was there any likelihood that I should be able to satisfy her ideas as to the qualifications requisite in a husband ? Could I give up my town pleasures ; content myself with an occasional flying visit to London, and live quietly at Grasslands in her company ? My

heart whispered to me that I could. I knew that my restlessness and inability to settle had partly arisen from my early disappointment. I believed that in her love, freely given to me, I should find a haven such as it had never been my lot to anchor in before : still waters where I should furl my sails and be at rest, thinking no more of the bright waves which danced outside.

These were my first thoughts ; and if my sense reminded me that perfect quiet is only pleasant whilst the storm is raging, and that when the sun shines again, and the breeze is just sufficient to bear the bark gallantly along, the mariner is apt to let his wishes with his fancy stray outside the harbour, I put the idea impatiently away, and decided that "all that" was a matter for future consideration.

With respect though to my writing she should no longer call me idle. I had intended setting to work as soon as the shooting season was over : I now determined that I would do so at once.

"Emmeline, is there a room in this house which I can appropriate to myself, and where I can feel certain of never being disturbed."

"Why—what for, Gerald?"

"I am going to write again : I have wasted too much time already."

"Will it not greatly interfere with your shooting?"

"A little, perhaps ; but it must be done ; I feel quite ashamed when I think that it is three years since I have attempted anything."

"There is poor papa's study, Gerald, just as he left it : you could scarcely find a better *sanctum*."

"No, indeed ; it is all that I desire. Please give orders that none of my belongings are disturbed." And surrounded by mute reminders of the genius which had passed away, I sat down to write my second novel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN IMPORTANT RESOLUTION.

THE shooting season had now commenced, and I found it very difficult to sit steadily at my work. The most trivial circumstances which had occurred whilst I was out with my gun would sometimes disperse my best ideas : whilst occasionally, after a long day's sport, my physical powers were so wearied, that I felt myself incapable of exerting my mental ones. At such times, throwing my pen on one side, I would mount my horse and ride over to Lee for rest and distraction.

Notwithstanding which, my book progressed rapidly. I had not sat down to it ignorant of what I was about to write. For months, and even years, I had carried about the plot in my mind, gathering a fact here, and an incident there, and taking note of everything which I considered likely to enrich the story.

Not only amidst the gaiety of my London life, but throughout my foreign tour, my hero and heroine had travelled by my side, until I was so familiar with them, as well as with the minor characters of the book, that I fancied there was nothing more to be thought or learnt upon the subject. I could hardly be said so much to compose the tale as to transcribe it from the unwritten copy in my mind ; consequently I wrote fast, and pondered little. Remembering the *kudos* gained by the "Quarry of Fate," I had few doubts as to what reception public opinion would accord to my second attempt ; I had no fear ; I was too confident to be successful. To be plain, I was writing, not from an inherent love of the pursuit, or an earnest desire to do my best for the sake of raising the art, but simply because I longed to hear my name ring in the ears of men, and to prove to Ada Penryhn that I was not the lover of idleness she gave me credit for being. Under such circumstances, and taking into consideration the fact that I was otherwise deeply enamoured and actively engaged, it would not have needed a very erudite prophet to foretell the fate which was in store for me.

I had become very intimate with the Graftons, and in their old-fashioned, kindly way, they made me welcome at all times. Thus I had innumerable opportunities of seeing and conversing with Ada Penryhn, and every interview I obtained with her increased my admiration and strengthened my love. Daily I discovered some new trait in her character which rendered it more worthy of my esteem, or some proof that those qualities which had first excited my interest in her had ripened into greater beauty with her advancing years.

I found that she was staunch and true in defending her friends behind their backs. She would not permit even so much as an insinuation to be made which reflected on their eccentricities ; and one day when I had been sufficiently careless as to speak of old Lady Grafton by some nickname in her presence, she administered a lecture to me that I did not easily forget. But at the same time I knew that she was quicker, perhaps, at discerning what was comical in others than I was myself ; for so long as there was no possibility of wounding the feelings of those who had been kind to her by the action, she could, with a stroke of her pen, draw the most graphic caricatures, the humour of which struck every one who saw them. I have my desk at this moment piled up with such mementoes, to almost each of which I could point and tell on what day and hour, and for which occasion, her ready fingers sketched it. Another discovery which I made was, that she was the owner of a heartfelt religion, pure and undefiled. Perhaps some may imagine that, being so worldly a man myself, this fact could not possess much interest for me. They are vastly mistaken. The muddier and more turbid I knew the waters of my soul to be, the greater delight I felt in gazing in the crystal stream which emanated from that of her I loved. I knew that I was unworthy of her in every respect, and especially in this ; yet I could not have worshipped her, had she been made of clay. A woman without religion is a living lie, a fair sepulchre full of dead men's bones. She comes into the world intended, by her purity and beauty, to refine and elevate our grosser natures ; she fulfils her mission by rendering us worse than herself. The most reckless man that ever lived has some spark of the divine left in him wherewith to yield the honour due to a religious woman. Not that Ada Penryhn's faith was manifested by much going to

church or making of long prayers. It was a very quiet and undemonstrative religion which she practised. She never preached me extempore sermons on my mode of life. I do not believe she had ever entered a Sunday schoolroom ; I am sure I never heard her quote a text. Still I knew that the feeling was there. Every one knew that it was there, whilst she made no concealment or demonstration of the fact.

She was by no means of a simple, trusting nature. She had seen too much of the world, and had thought too deeply, to permit her to be so. She could not, with her experience, have been intelligent, and remained child-like. On the contrary, with all her motherly love, her girlish fun, her universal charity, she had more the head of a man than a woman. In company her youth made her merry ; her beauty made her confident ; her desire to please made her talkative ; she appeared merely as a very engaging woman, who could converse on most topics, and had, as the phrase runs, " plenty to say for herself." But taken alone, when a serious mood was on her, sounded on subjects not fit for discussion in a crowd, her ideas drawn out on the deepest questions of the day, whether theological or social, (I do not think she ever dabbled in politics,) and then Ada Penryhn showed of what she was capable. The more, however, that I strive to define her character, the more difficult I feel the task to be. How is it possible in a few pages of print to combine the lights and shadows, the sunshine and rain, the hilarity of one moment and the thought of the next, which made her life one long variety, an ever-shifting panorama of head and heart ? The more I saw of her the more she charmed me, and I had reason to believe that she was not only thoroughly aware of my affection, but ready to return it. What was it, then, which held me back whenever the words in which I should ask her to pledge her faith to me rose to my lips ? She was her own mistress, and I was in an excellent position to marry ; yet when the favourable opportunity presented itself (and how often did it not rise to tempt me ?) my courage melted away, and I felt no right to address her. Sometimes I fancied that she almost expected the question to come ; that she read my heart, and saw how hard it was for me to tune my speech to other notes ; still I could not speak. Even when, one day towards the middle of October, I heard she was about to leave the Graf-

tons to visit her father in Scotland, I remained dumb. To the very last I hung about the carriage which conveyed her away, feeling almost guilty in my continued silence, and fancying (though I believe this was but fancy) a shade of coolness in her manner of addressing me, as if she were disappointed in my conduct. The baby and I were excellent friends by this time, and as I placed a parting present in his hands, I ventured to ask his mother not to forget me. Whatever answer she made to my request was lost in her busy endeavour to arrange her various small belongings on the back seat of the carriage; and as I saw the vehicle drive away with her, and considered how many temptations to banish me from her memory she might encounter before we met again, I could have cursed myself aloud, not for my diffidence, but for the folly which had engendered it.

For the thought which had ever risen like a mocking devil to dry upon my tongue the confession of my love for Ada Penryhn was the thought of Julia Sherman.

A few days ago, whilst I was busy over this history, my sister Beatrice, whose two eldest daughters have already been launched upon society, bustled into my writing apartment.

"Gerald," she exclaimed, "is what I hear true, that you are going to publish the story of your own life?"

"It is, Beatrice," I replied, laying down my pen in compliment to her presence.

"Rather a rash proceeding, I think. I only hope you will not put anything about Julia Sherman in it."

"But how could I write my life without," I demanded, "since that unfortunate name became entangled with the most eventful parts of it?"

"Well, if you will mention such things, you must be prepared to have all the critics down upon you. They will say that your book is not a proper one for girls to read, and not fit to be on a drawing-room table; and, indeed," continued my sister, bridling her matronly person, "I should be very sorry to see such a story in my own daughters' hands."

"You would be sorry that Laura or Harriett should learn that I, or any other man, had ever lived a dissipated life; and yet I think I heard you mention before them the other day that Sir Charles Dudley, who had dined at your table the night before, is said to be the greatest *roué* about town."

"Oh, my dear Gerald!" interposed my sister, hastily, "that is nothing to the purpose at all. Girls cannot be expected to go through the world with their eyes shut; and we know that such things *are*; but that is a very different thing to sitting down and deliberately reading about them in print."

"Very different indeed!" I echoed, sarcastically; "in the one case the bare fact is told, without the possibility of holding forth the temptations or accidents which may have led to it, either as warning or excuse. In the other, the relation is introduced, not only that it may serve as a beacon against the shoals on which any one of us may be wrecked, but to teach us, when we would judge our neighbours, that there may be extenuating circumstances behind the most glaring outrages upon what we call society. Yet, my dear Beatrice, I am quite aware that in these days of light, when men appear in public beside characters whose names they dare not mention in private, and call their racers by the slang titles awarded to women of the same stamp; when girls discuss the doings and dresses of the *demi-monde*, as if they were fashionable topics; and even newspapers have been known to devote their leading columns to the police court adventures of the same persons; a history written on a subject like mine will in all probability be pronounced dangerous food for the *immature* minds to which the name of 'Anonyma' is familiar as a household word. Be comforted, then, with the assurance that I shall not feel in the least offended if you forbid Laura and Harriett even to cut the pages of my book; in fact, my dear sister, I aspire to write for those who already know the world, and their approval is all that I wish for."

"But the critics!" gasped Lady Claremont.

"Well, as to the critics—but I will say nothing about them, or they will assert that I have attempted to disarm them beforehand, which I have neither the right nor the wish to do. I only hope that as they are great they will be merciful, and not forget Pope's lines:—

"Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, ne'er is, nor e'er shall be;
In every work regard the writer's end,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due."

"I can't say I echo the sentiment," exclaimed my sister, leaving the room more irate than she had entered it, "and since I see you are determined not to take my advice, I hope they will cut you up well ;" and I have little doubt her pious wish will be gratified.

To return, however, (with such as are not too fastidious to follow me,) to the subject of Julia Sherman. It is not easy to describe the feelings with which I regarded this girl. To say that I was utterly indifferent towards a very pretty woman who professed an attachment to me, is to write myself down cold-blooded, which I assuredly was not. On the other hand, to allow that a heart, which was filled with the image of Ada Penryhn, could stoop to do more than take an interest in Mrs Sherman's daughter, would be equally untrue, and I had felt from the beginning that if she had not been rich in outward attractions, I should never have been so readily duped into believing that Julia cared for me. The interest, however, which I had experienced for her had already died out ; the discovery that, instead of having thrown herself upon my protection as a poor orphan girl left destitute of everything but such affection as I could give her, she had deserted her mother's roof, and a respectable life, for the sake of a better establishment, had caused a great revolution to take place in my feelings regarding her, and from that hour she had ranked no higher in my estimation than the most fallen of her sisters, for she had done voluntarily what I, with all my careless disregard of right, would not have tempted her to do. From the moment when she had come to me in Brook Street I had never been easy in my mind ; often had I sat by myself for hours, questioning whether I had not committed a fearful sin by accepting the girl's offer, and aiding her to take a step which must be irrevocable. But since the date when I had met her mother, and learned by what a tissue of deceit I had been drawn into leading her wrong, I had acquitted myself of all blame in the matter. Now, my whole wish was to be rid of an encumbrance which had become intolerable ; of a responsibility which, had I read my heart aright, I had never incurred. I was anxious to tell Ada Penryhn that I loved her, but my loyalty forbade my doing so, until I had made such arrangements as should prevent Julia Sherman from ever saying that she had a claim upon me. I could not ask the

one for the promise of her hand until I felt confident there was no circumstance in my present life which could justify her refusing my request, and yet, it was hard to make up my mind to go through such a scene as I imagined must precede my breaking off all intimacy with the other.

It is seldom we do anything foolish or wrong, but we find ourselves entangled in the meshes of its effects at the very moment when we most wish to be free. My perplexities kept me undecided until Christmas was near at hand. One day I had settled upon this course of action, the next upon that, but through all my uncertainty I never relinquished the conviction that on Ada Penryhn's acceptance or refusal of my offer of marriage depended my future happiness or misery. At last I made up my mind, and resolving that it was not incumbent upon me to waste my life for a chimeric duty, told Emmeline that I should run up to town for a short time. I had often visited it during my sojourn at Grasslands, so that she evinced no curiosity as to my design in doing so, and after the absence of a few weeks, I returned to keep Christmas-day with them—a free man. It is needless to detail the means by which I escaped from bondage, or what the person whom it most concerned thought of my resolution. Suffice it to say that she received the news with far less emotion than I had anticipated; that a certain legal document which secured a comfortable provision for her lifetime appeared to act as a wonderful salve to her wounded affections; and that we parted good friends.

From that time I was the most light-hearted of men. I could not communicate with Ada Penryhn because she was moving about the country, and had given me no encouragement to do so by leaving her address; but I knew that she intended returning to Kensington early in the year, and I wished to take her answer from her own lips. In the meanwhile I was not idle. The painters and paperers had not been put into the house in Brook Street the year before, as I had needed it for immediate occupation; now I took pleasure in dismantling the old place, and having it bravely adorned, thinking the while that *some one* might occupy it, even before the season was over. I laughed inwardly as I caught myself thinking rather prematurely how this room would make a pretty boudoir and that a good nursery, and remembered that I was actually about to ask permission to have *that baby* imposed upon me

for life. I found I had not yet perfectly realised the fact ; I was quite ready to become a husband, but it was rather awful to consider that the placing of a wedding ring upon Ada Penryhn's finger included my investiture with the dignity of a stepfather. I hurried over the last volume of my novel more quickly perhaps than any *man* has had the rashness to do before ; drew up all the threads of my story with one vigorous pull, tied them in a good hard knot, and then broke them off short. " Brevity is the soul of wit," I said to myself as I wound up the loves of my hero and heroine. " There is no use in spinning out the account of a reconciliation ; it never takes long in real life, and as Pope says, ' First follow nature, and your judgment frame by her just standard,' so I shall leave twaddle to the women," which I consequently did, and devoted a couple of chapters to explaining away the long series of misapprehensions and mysteries with which the remainder of the three volumes was filled.

But so far I gained my object that the work was finished and in the hands of my publisher before the season had commenced. As soon as the improvements in Brook Street were completed, I was foolish enough to take up my residence there, although London was as empty as a nest in autumn. The clubs were only half-filled, the company in the Parks chiefly composed of the lower orders ; the shop windows, a mere blank compared to the glories which should be theirs, thereafter ; and I rode or wandered amidst these solitudes, without any better occupation but such as the various fears, hopes, doubts, and anticipations of my feverish brain afforded me. I had ascertained the address of Mrs Penryhn in Kensington, and every afternoon I used to ride past her little house, and glance wistfully at the windows to see if the blinds were yet drawn up ; and twice a week, if not oftener, I would stop to inquire of the woman left in charge when her mistress was expected home, to which she generally replied that she was sure she couldn't tell. On one particular afternoon, following a day on which I thought I had observed a more than usually acrid expression on the countenance of this worthy female as I summoned her to answer my persevering inquiries, I resolved that I would not call at the house for another week at least ; and turning my steps deliberately in the other direction, entered the reading-room of my favourite club. I had scarcely set

my foot upon its threshold, however, before all my feelings of gloom vanished as if by magic, for George Lascelles' hand was in my own, and his hearty voice pouring forth a string of questions as to my whereabouts, and the reason of my appearance.

"I never expected to meet you here, old boy," he said; "it's the most confounded piece of good luck that ever happened to me. I made sure you were vegetating at Grasslands, studying cows and milkmaids, and all that sort of thing, and wouldn't be up in town for another month. What brings you, Estcourt?"

"What brings you, Lascelles?" I replied, laughing.

"Business, my dear fellow, *pur et simple*, but you have no such excuse. What can have induced you to leave the country before Easter?"

"Because it is positively more *ennuyante* than town, and that is saying a great deal. Besides, I have been furbishing up the old house in Brook Street, and the workmen wanted looking after. Where are you staying, George?"

"At Long's. The upper stories in Cavendish Square are wrapped in curl-papers and brown-holland pinafores; and I couldn't go and live with the charwoman and the black-beetles in the kitchen: I am too particular about my character."

"Exactly so! well, you must come to me; it will be the greatest charity, for I have thought of committing suicide more than once during the last week."

"There is nothing I should like better;" and linked arm-in-arm, my cousin and I left the club-room, and sauntered up New Bond Street. He was full of fun and information, and rattled away on the subject of his own flirtations with the same ease that he told a story about his father's butler. I envied his flow of spirits and careless freedom of manner; whilst he rallied me upon my backwardness in relating my own adventures; and opened his eyes very wide when I chanced, in the course of conversation, to inform him of certain changes which had lately taken place in my affairs.

"Halloa, Jerry!" he exclaimed, "what's come to you, old fellow? going to turn Methodist?"

"Or Mormon," I replied; "one is as likely as the other."

"But not so pleasant," he answered, gaily. "I'd rather be

the Mormon by half, if Salt Lake City wasn't so out of the way. By Jove! there's a pretty girl!"

He was looking in the direction of a miniature brougham, which was standing outside a shop door, as he spoke. I raised my eyes at his exclamation, and saw the face of Mrs Penryhn. In a moment I had left his side, and was leaning in at the carriage window.

"Mrs Penryhn! I am so delighted to see you; when did you return?"

"Only last evening, Mr Estcourt."

She blushed deeply as I addressed her; but I was certain that her voice had not the same tone of cordiality with which she used to greet me at Lee.

"I have been at your house almost every day to inquire when you were expected home," I continued, "until I am afraid the old lady in charge was rather tired of answering my questions."

"Indeed! I have returned earlier than I intended."

"I may call, may I not?" I said, thrusting my head still further through the window, and looking full in her face. "I have been so anxious to meet you again."

"Yes, certainly; I shall be pleased to see you," was her reply, and she stooped as if searching for something in the fluffy mat at her feet.

"Have you lost anything, Mrs Penryhn?"

"Yes—no—it does not signify, thank you."

There was assuredly a difference in her manner, as well as her voice; it was cooler, more constrained, and as if she were only anxious to get rid of me. Still I would not permit myself to be discouraged, but repeated earnestly—

"I have been hoping to see you again for so long; when may I call on you? this evening?"

"This evening!" she exclaimed, shrinking from me. "Oh no, Mr Estcourt, pray not!"

"Well, to-morrow, then."

"I am very busy just now," she faltered, "having so shortly returned from Scotland; and"——

"I *must* speak to you," I returned decidedly; "I have something very particular to say."

I felt that I had anticipated asking her that question so long, that, now I had met her again, I could not wait another

moment. The energy of my words startled her, and she answered, though nervously—

“ Well, then, to-morrow afternoon, if it is really of consequence ; but I lead a very quiet life. Mr Estcourt, and do not often see visitors.”

“ It will rest with yourself, Mrs Penryhn,” I replied, significantly, “ whether I am a frequent visitor at your house or not ;” and raising my hat as I spoke, I left her to rejoin George Lascelles. I saw, by the look of intelligence which sprung into her face, that she understood the meaning of my words ; and felt that I had already committed myself, and had but to accept such answer as she might choose to give me. My cousin was of course very ready with his insinuations on the subject of my *rencontre* with the lady in the miniature brougham ; but as he would have been just as full of badinage with any man who had spoken to a pretty woman without introducing his noble self to her especial notice, I bore his jokes with as much equanimity as I could assemble, until he wearied of them, and left off asking for her address of his own accord. We passed the evening in some gaiety together, throughout which I could not, for one moment, dismiss the knowledge that before that hour came round again I should have taken my answer, for weal or woe, from the lips of Ada Penryhn. Never, since I had determined to ask her to be mine, had I felt so fainthearted at the prospect of her reply. Her behaviour on our unexpected meeting, although not positively repellant, had been too formal to be called friendly, and was a strikingly apparent change from the intimacy we had enjoyed in Dorsetshire. Was she angry with me, or weary of me ? had she heard anything to my disadvantage ? seen any one she liked better ? These questions fretted and worried me through the livelong night, as they have done many a lover before ; but the more perplexed and anxious I felt, the more determined I became that I would solve my doubts and suspicions as soon as ever I had speech of her again. Rising in the same mind, I loftily refused to give George Lascelles any notion of the business on which I was bound, but mounting my horse at the very earliest hour at which fashion permits us to see our neighbours, rode off quickly in the direction of Kensington.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GERALD BECOMES THE HAPPIEST OF MEN.

IT was with a beating heart that I knocked at the door of Mrs Penryhn's house. It was one of those tiny places which swallow up huge rents, and formed part of a crescent which stood back from the road, with a carriage-drive all to itself, and overlooked Kensington Gardens. The woman servant who opened the door to me appeared as if her head nearly touched the ceiling; the winding staircase was so narrow that I felt inclined to gather up my coat-tails lest I should overthrow the statuettes which adorned the little niches in its wall; the drawing-room, into which I was eventually ushered, was completely filled by a couple of sofas, and several lounging-chairs, which seemed as though they had been placed there for the convenience of such visitors as wished to inspect the array of porcelain, tinted glass, ormolu, and wood-carving with which the walls were decorated. Everything, however, was in good taste; there was not a piece of rubbish in the room; the only colours employed in furnishing were subdued, and there was little gilding; all this, notwithstanding my agitation, I took in at a glance.

Mrs Penryhn kept me waiting for nearly a quarter of an hour: to me it seemed as though she would never appear. I had purposely avoided thinking of what I should say to her; I knew that when I looked upon her face words would come to me naturally, and, naturally, best; yet now in the suspense of attending her presence, speech after speech continued to force themselves into my mind, and some of so absurd an import, that I dreaded lest in my nervousness during the coming interview they should reappear without my intending it.

At last there was the sound of an approaching footstep, and I nearly upset a whole stand of knick-knacks as I hastily rose and strove to dispose myself against the mantelpiece in an attitude of negligent unconcern. I heard her leave the upper room, advance to the landing, and then retreat again as if

uncertain what to do ; finally she set her feet upon the staircase, but stopped them to dally with her child, and issue some orders to the nurse, which, although delivered in a voice which was intended to be very off-hand and collected, betrayed somehow to my listening ear that the calmness was assumed. Her indecision gave me courage, and when, a few minutes afterwards, she entered the drawing-room with cheeks that were very pale and eyes that were suspicious of her having wept, all my timidity at the prospect of addressing her evaporated, and I only remembered that she was a *woman* and I a man, able and willing to share the sorrows from which my love could not protect her. I had not intended to rush at once into the subject. I had purposed, at least, to pave the way to my proposal by a few ordinary sentences, but the sight of her evident distress drove everything from my mind but the errand upon which I had come, and instead of releasing the hand she gave me, I held it fast and said—

“Ada, do you know the reason for which I am here to-day ?”

“I have guessed it,” she answered, faintly.

“The question I have come to ask you has been hovering on my lips for months past, but I have not dared to utter it. I put it to you once before in the hotel garden at Fresh-wave. You know what was your answer at that time. Am I to have the same again ?”

She did not speak to or even look at me, but her face alternately flushed and grew pale, and I could feel the trembling of the hand I held in my own. At last she articulated—

“Pray let me sit down, Mr Estcourt.”

I let her go, and she threw herself into a chair. How differently is deep emotion displayed in real life to what most novelists describe it to us. My fate was hanging upon the reply which should issue from her lips as certainly as if I had thrown myself upon my knees, or refused to release her before she decided it. Yet I permitted her to pass me as quietly as though she had been my sister, and taking possession of another chair, wheeled it along the carpet to the side of hers, and following her example, sat down and waited patiently until it should please her to speak to me. Finding, however, after a few seconds that the answer did not come, I said—

"How much longer are you going to keep me in suspense, Ada?"

"What am I to say?" she asked with a mixture of petulance and trouble.

"You know that I love you—you must have guessed it, seen it long ago. Do you love me in return?"

She covered her face with her hands as she answered—

"Yes—you must have seen it also; but I cannot marry you!"

"Cannot *marry* me—and why?"

I do not think it was unreasonable in me to feel surprise; I was of good birth and connexion, had youth and health in abundance, and a patrimony which, in moderation, could satisfy the desires of any one. If she loved me, as she had confessed she did, the only obstacle that I could see between us was removed.

"If you care for me, Ada, why not? My fortune is not large, but it is sufficient to supply us with"—

"Oh! it is not that," she said, interrupting me; "pray do not think so meanly of me. When I was at Lee I thought nothing could be brighter than the prospect before us, but since then—since then"—

"Since then—what, dearest? tell me all," I said boldly, taking her hand; for her manner assured me that, whatever the objection she foresaw, in the end I should be victor.

"I have heard such dreadful tales of you, things I could scarcely have believed possible, and which have made me feel that you and I can never be happy together."

"And who repeated them to you, Ada?"

"I must not tell you that, but I fear that they are true. It is useless dissembling; I must not have any false shame in this matter," (but as she spoke a deep blush overspread her face.) "Gerald, I have heard that you lead a dissipated life."

"You have heard wrong, Ada; I do no such thing."

"Nor have done?" she said, inquiringly.

"My dearest girl," I answered, "if you insist upon my delivering up the history of my past life before you promise to be mine, I will obey you; but you know enough to be aware that such a request is, in any case, a foolish if not a dangerous one. Some day, if you wish it, you shall hear all,

but it will be best for both of us if you refrain. Men are not women, Ada; their doings, when they owe faith to no one, will not generally bear inspection; but you do not, I hope, so far wrong me as to suppose that if you trust me with your precious love I shall do anything to disgrace the responsibility. I can go further, and say that ever since I entertained the hope of winning it I have kept myself for you alone. Over the past I have no control, but you have my present, and I swear that the future shall be yours; will that not satisfy you?"

"Say no more, Gerald; if to-day is mine and to-morrow shall be, I have no wish or right to pry into the things of yesterday. Yet now, your motto must be 'All or none.' Perhaps you will think me exacting, but if you love me"——

"*If* I love you, Ada! I have loved you from the hour I saw you first, and no grief has ever sunk into my soul like the bitter disappointment you gave me at Freshwave. I was but a boy then compared to what I am now, but I have never seen another woman whom I would ask to be my wife. Will you not give me my answer?"

Her hand moved gently from her side and stole into mine. I clasped it as though held in a vice.

"You engage yourself then to me, Ada? You are not afraid to promise to marry me?"

"Upon one condition, Gerald," she whispered.

"It is granted, dearest, before it is asked," I eagerly exclaimed. "I would not resign the happiness of this moment were you to demand my life in return." And leaving my seat, I folded my promised wife in my arms, and all my doubts and fears went to sleep upon her lips.

It was an indescribable five minutes that followed Ada Penryhn's acceptance of my proposal. We sat with tightly clasped hands, silent but inexpressibly content, experiencing one of those rare periods in life when we forget our mortality, and almost believe that heaven has begun for us. She was the first to break that silence; her knowledge of the fallibility of human enjoyment was greater than my own; and she roused herself and me from that short dream with a sigh.

"And now for my condition," she said; "we must not forget that. Gerald, do you think you can give up a life of dissipation for my sake?"

"But what do you call a life of dissipation, Ada? I am not aware that I have ever been guilty of such; I have only lived as other men do."

"You have answered my question," she said, sadly, "*as other men do*. That is what the man I marry must refrain from doing. I do not suspect that, once pledged to myself, you would prove inconstant; I could not love you if I did; but if you would make me happy you must give me the spirit as well as the letter of your faith. It will not be sufficient for me to feel that you mix in scenes of dissipation without partaking of them; you must not mix in them; you must come to me unsullied. I want to know when I touch your hand that it has not touched that of another woman; when I meet your eyes that they have looked admiration on no one else; when I hear your voice that it has not even professed to compliment others; and particularly," she added, with a shudder, "such others as are the only ones you will meet in the scenes to which I have alluded. I know my condition is a hard one; I feel that it will be difficult for you to comply with; and therefore, Gerald, if you think the same, forget what has just passed between us, and let us be friends as we were before."

But I only held her hand the closer, and forced her to turn her face towards me and renew the promise which she had first given, whilst I warmly asserted that the possession of herself would be the commencement of an era of happiness for me, purer than any I had tasted yet, and which would so completely satisfy my heart as to leave no room for meaner desires.

She smiled at my rhapsodies; but she still looked incredulous. Perhaps she had been told the same thing before, and proved it to be false.

"You must not be angry with me, Gerald; but I feel that you should know my whole mind. I am aware that the world makes a great distinction between the sexes in this matter; that it permits men to indulge in every excess, whilst if a woman has one stain upon an otherwise spotless character, she is supposed not to be fit to become the wife of one who has run riot up to the moment of his marriage. We accept the verdict, such as men have made it for their own convenience, but we do not endorse it; we listen to the asser-

tion that such a life is necessary for them and not for us, but we do not believe it; we profess to shut our eyes to their goings on, and our ears to the tales against them, but we both see and hear, and those of us who think—*feel*. We knew that God made no such laws between us; that He never intended to give the one entire liberty without the possible contingency of blame, and the other a life of humiliation for one false step. Whether it is the best means by which men can have carried out the Creator's design that they should be the protectors of the weaker sex, will not be known, I suppose, until the day when He judges us all, pending which, it is a system which is working inevitable harm to women."

"In what way, Ada?" I asked.

"By making us lose faith in you, Gerald; in your justice and your power of leading us right. There have been heavy complaints lately, both in private and public, about the women of England. Girls are said to be bolder, and less ready to marry for love than they used to be; married women to be flirting, 'fast,' and given to extravagance in dress; the whole tone of society, in fact, to have become lowered. This may or may not be the case; but if it is, you may be sure that the reason of the alteration is to be found in yourselves. *What women are men make them*. We do not dress, and dance, and sing, and talk for one another; we do it for you. Whatever men show us to be the taste of the age, that taste we insensibly adopt. No lectures upon extravagance; no animadversions upon free manners; no attempts at talking down false hair, false complexions, and false figures will have the least effect so long as you show us by your conduct that such things are not repulsive to you in others, whatever they may be in ourselves. Whilst young men desert ball-rooms for less respectable places—where dancing is carried on; vote our pic-nics a 'bore,' yet will accept a bachelor's invitation for the same with eagerness; pretend, in fact, to be '*blasé*,' and 'done-up' for every properly-conducted entertainment, though we know they are lively enough elsewhere, young ladies will imagine that it is the '*laissez-aller*' style that they miss when mixing in society, and endeavour to render themselves more like what they conclude their gentlemen friends admire."

"I should think 'young ladies' had very seldom heard

or thought of such things and places as you allude to, Ada."

She smiled at the ignorance displayed by my remark.

"I believe that is what most men imagine, Gerald, but they are greatly mistaken. You can scarcely let your light burn so palpably as you do in this nineteenth century, and expect us not to catch the reflection of its glare. Women know you nearly as well as you do yourselves : or if they err, it is not on the side of leniency, for their fears and their pique exaggerate the evil, and I fancy some of you would be rather astonished if you knew what Lotharios your lady acquaintances give you credit for being."

"But what has all this to do with us, Ada? From this hour you will have no need to make conjectures about me, for my heart and my life shall be alike open to you."

"But are you sure that you are not promising more than you can perform, Gerald? You have been reared to consider such an existence necessary to you ; can you give up, not the companionship of friends of your own sex, nor the gaiety to be found in good society, but association with such as are in no society at all? I have thought deeply on this subject, almost, I may say, since I was a child, for the first thing which made me think of it was the loss of my poor mother. You know how that happened : you must know it ; it has been in everybody's mouth ; but I was taught to consider her as dead, until the fact of her existence and disgrace was revealed to me by the tattle of the servants in my father's house. At that time I was too young to understand all that I heard, but I never forgot it ; and as I grew older, and listened to other tales from the same sources, of the gay life my father led, I used to sit alone and wonder why he was still at the head of his household, honoured and respected, and she—my mother, who had never died, had been sent forth with her name branded with infamy. The thought sunk very deeply into my heart, until I began to associate the idea of my living mother with each act of my daily life ; and I never witnessed any signs of my father's prosperity or happiness or wealth without seeing another picture of her fancied misfortune and misery. But one day, when I had not long been introduced, my feelings received a fearful shock. I had learnt the name of my mother's betrayer, and as I sat at a large ball supper the lady

next to me turned round to the gentleman who was waiting on her, and addressing him with a sweet smile as Lord Edward Grieves, desired him to fetch her what she wanted. I could scarcely look at him, but I knew in a moment who he was. I tried to continue eating, but the food stuck in my throat ; the brilliant lights and the flower-bedecked table danced before my eyes ; I thought I should have fainted. He was there, his breast decorated with the honours he had won in his profession, received with smiles by his hostess, permitted to touch the hand of the young and the pure, whilst she whom he had dragged downwards, defiled and left, God knows where, would, had she dared to enter that place, have been hooted from it as if she were unclean. Oh, Gerald ! who made this difference between us and you ?” and overcome by the pain of her recollections, Ada Penryhn hid her face in her hands and sobbed aloud. I tried to comfort her, but it was difficult to know what to say ; I felt the force of her argument, but I also knew there was no remedy for the evil.

“ It seemed to turn me altogether against men,” she said presently ; “ the injustice and the cruelty of social law struck me so forcibly that I felt up in arms for my whole sex. I perceived that men had framed such a law to protect themselves and not us ; that whilst they would preserve intact the sanctity of their homes, they put no limits to their own liberty ; and that their object in laying so heavy a punishment upon a woman’s dereliction of duty was to force us to a purity of life of which they did not choose to coerce themselves to set us the example. The same principle is carried out through all our laws. We are supposed to be the weakest sex, both in mind and body ; yet we are punished the most severely. One false step on the part of a wife, and no extenuating circumstances will be taken in excuse for a man’s outraged honour ; fifty false steps on the part of a husband, and if he has not injured the woman he has sworn to protect by personal violence, the law does not hold him liable. He may break her heart by little and little, but if he does not break her head, she must remain tied to him for life. Oh, Gerald ! it is easy for any one who knows the laws of England for women to see that our *protectors* have had the making of them.”

“ But, my dearest, you have never suffered yourself, I trust, from the inequality of the world’s judgment respecting men

and women." This I said, because I fancied from her total silence respecting her marriage that it had not been a happy one. She changed countenance when I mentioned the subject, but she was staunch in her duty to the dead.

"Gerald, that is my past. Let us bury it with yours."

"But you did not love Penryhn, Ada?" I asked anxiously.

"Would you care for me more if I confessed to having entered into a mercenary marriage, or do you believe that I shall love you less for having been a true wife to my first husband? Remember that he was the father of my child; that if he engrossed my affections or disappointed my hopes, he can never do either again, and let us respect the grave where he lies."

"But you did not love him as you love me, Ada; say that, dearest?" I persevered. I should have needed no better answer than the glowing face she turned upon me.

"If it will make you happier to know that life never seemed so fair to me as it does at this moment, you may rest content with the assurance. Upon that *one* condition, Gerald, that you are mine only, I am yours henceforward, to do as you will with."

"And for that promise," I answered, "I would put my seal to fifty conditions instead of one."

This was all that I ever extracted from her relative to her married life. The name of Saville Penryhn was never discussed between us; or if in my folly I sometimes attempted to force her to confess her indifference to his memory, I found that her rebuke, though gentle, could be as steadfast as her love. Yet she betrayed herself, though unconsciously, before we parted on that first happy day.

I was standing at the door, loath to lose sight of her, long after she had asked me to go, when I closed it again, and, for about the twentieth time, returned into the centre of the room.

"Ada, I am really going, but—tell me once more that you love me."

She laughed softly, took my hand in both her own, and laid her forehead gently against my breast.

"You *know* it, Gerald. What need is there to repeat it over again?"

"And since when, Ada?" (I could not see her face, but I

saw the blush which ran along the youthful parting of her hair.) "Only since this morning?" She laughed again, and shook her head. "Since I first met you at Lee!" another shake. "What, *before* that, Ada?" I seized her face in my hands, and turned it up by force; it was crimson.

"Not at Freshwave! Darling, did you love me at Freshwave?" Two large tears rose slowly into her gray eyes, and hung trembling on the dark lashes.

"Gerald, you will never be untrue to me? I have waited for this so long."

This was all; but it nearly turned my brain with joy.

CHAPTER XXV

BITTERS AND SWEETS.

As soon as Ada and I had announced our engagement to our immediate friends, the letters which we received were various, and characteristic of the writers. Colonel Rivers simply indited a note, in which he wished us all happiness, and sent me an invitation for the grouse season; and as he had nothing to do with the disposal of his daughter's hand, it was more than I had expected from him. My mother, on the contrary, paid the postage from Paris of four sheets full of negative congratulations, in which she "trusted" I had chosen wisely; but could not say she was without her "fears," knowing too well, alas! what style of people my "father's friends" had usually been. She hoped that I had remembered what St Paul said about being "unequally yoked with unbelievers," and that I had selected a "Mary" as my partner for life. All this was less annoying to me on account of its ill-timed quotations, as because I remembered only too vividly the conversation I had had with my mother in Paris respecting Lilius and Mons. le Sage, and how briskly she had then refuted all my objections to my sister's marriage with a person of opposite faith. But consistency had never been one of Lady Mary's virtues. Beatrice took an early opportunity of sending me

her good wishes. She had always liked Ada, she was pleased to say ; there was a *je ne sais quoi* about her, which set her above the herd ; at the same time, she thought it a disadvantage in these days for a man to have *too* pretty a wife. Gertrude's letter did not arrive for some weeks after the others, and then it was full of grumblings. She had nothing to say against Mrs Penryhn, but she was "*terribly disappointed* ;" had expected me to do "*much better* ;" I had a right to look "*much higher*," I might have married into the aristocracy if I had so chosen. Why, there were her sisters-in-law, my own cousins, Cecilia and Mary Lascelles, right under my nose, and either of them would have had me if I had proposed to them. Oh, she had no "*patience*" with me ; and neither had I with her flighty epistle. Emmeline's, after all, was the only one that gave me pleasure ; I carried it to Ada the day I received it, and we read and answered it together. She was so very sure, this dearest sister of mine, that she had foreseen it from the very beginning ; she was so warm in her congratulations, so tender in her hopes, so certain that she and Ada had but to know to love each other.

"I love her already," said my *fiancée*, as we finished the perusal of the letter. "I used to think, Gerald, when I saw her at Lee, that if you never asked me to be your wife, I could tell my disappointment to her, and not be afraid that she would despise me for the confession."

But although Emmy's affection thus gratified me, I cannot say that the indifference displayed about my new prospects by my other relations had any power to damp my happiness. It was too profuse for that.

I went on my way, spreading the news far and wide, and calling on my acquaintance to rejoice with me. The intelligence appeared to be received amongst the Estcourts with the greatest surprise. Perhaps they had imagined that I was too wild to think of settling down quietly in marriage ; perhaps the wishes of some of them had fathered the idea. My aunt, Mrs Logan, positively changed countenance when she heard of my engagement. "*You* about to be married !" she exclaimed ; "and to Mrs Saville Penryhn ! well, I hope the young lady knows what she is about." I only laughed at her dismay ; I could afford to be amiable. I even jogged my cousin Thomas's memory about the scene at Freshwave, and

asked him if he did not suspect I had a *penchant* for Miss Rivers even then. He did not reply, however, except by one of his old looks of sullenness, which vividly recalled the time I alluded to ; and as I saw the remembrance was not so pleasant to him as it had become to myself, I dropped the subject. I heard it recorded that the only remark made by my spinster aunts, Sarah and Susan, when they heard of my intended marriage, was to the effect, that if I expected to get anything out of *them* for a wedding present, I was very much mistaken ; that I had robbed the family sufficiently as it was, and *they* could not forget, whoever else did, that if all had their due, the Castlemaine diamond would at that moment be in the possession of their brother Jabez, to will away as he thought fit ; but as I only repeat this speech from hearsay, I cannot vouch for its accuracy, however great the probability that it was made. To none of my uncles did I trouble myself to make a formal announcement of my engagement to Ada Penryhn except to Mr Jabez Estcourt. He received the news with his usual grunt.

"Rather soon to put on the fetters, uncle, is it not ?" I added, with an attempt at pleasantry ; "but it must have come, I suppose, sooner or later."

"Don't see the necessity of it," he growled in reply.

"I can't agree with you. I should have made a point of marrying, anyway, if it was only to prevent your brother William's children from stepping into my shoes. The only difference is, that in the present case I have a prospect of happiness instead of misery ; but if it had blighted my whole life, I would have neglected no means by which I could secure to my children's children the position which, after yourself, I hold as 'head of the family.'"

My uncle smiled a grim smile.

"You can't forget that," he said, roughly.

"I never intend to forget it," I answered ; "if you had thought more of it, uncle, you would have taken care to leave a son behind you, whose claim to be so called should have been indisputable." But the next moment I feared I had gone too far. Never had I seen the countenance of my uncle Jabez display so much emotion. His features gave a sudden twitch, and then a torrent of crimson poured over his face, and he turned upon me in a rage—

"How dare you, sir, express your opinion as to what I should or should not have done? You speak to me of a subject which not one of my brothers or sisters would presume to approach. You have well earned the character they give you of a forward upstart."

His words nettled me.

"I am my father's son," I replied, "and a true Estcourt; and I speak my mind because I am not ashamed of it. I am sorry if I touched you upon a tender point, and since you are so quick to take offence, I will revoke the opinion which I innocently expressed. I think one uncle Jabez, after all, is enough for any family."

My words, strange to say, instead of making him more angry, had the effect of calming him.

"I *was* quick," he replied. "Let us say no more about it," and from that time we were as good friends as before.

My uncle, Lord Portsdowne, heard of the step I proposed to take in a very different spirit. He prophesied marriage to be the best thing for me; wished that his younger sons would follow my example; took his wife and daughters to call upon Ada directly they returned to town, and voted her the prettiest creature he had seen since the days when he had been in love himself. My cousin George clapped me on the back, and declared I was the luckiest fellow going; and Jack, after having sent me a volley of playful abuse on my intended desertion of the bachelor corps, came up to town, and on being introduced to my future wife, revoked all his previous sentiments, and went so far as to add, that if I would only find him such another there should be two weddings on one day.

So far, all went smoothly. I was drifting surely, as I thought, into that quiet haven of still waters which had appeared so desirable a rest to me, and my content was so complete that I imagined I had reached the acme of human bliss. I had not yet learnt that we never know what the greatest happiness is until we have lost it. The first incident which occurred to damp my ardour, and make life look a little less beautiful to me, was the publication and criticism of my book. With the commencement of the season, the three volumes duly appeared, rich in gilding and colour, and with fresh, crisp, uncut leaves—a fit offering, as I fondly imagined, to lay at the feet of my love. It was with some such words that

I placed a copy of the work in her hands, and she received it with far greater pride than I put it there. In a couple of days she had finished its perusal, and then I naturally looked for her opinion of the story, hoping, I may almost say trusting, to hear her express a flattering one. It would be so pleasant to have her for a critic, if she approved, and I scarcely doubted, caring for me as she did, that she would approve. But Ada Penryhn was essentially truthful, and no amount of love could overbear her conscientiousness. I was forced to ask her for her verdict more than once before she delivered it, and then I did her the injustice to think that she expected too much of me.

"I like it, Gerald," she said, deliberately, "but chiefly, I fear, because it is yours. Anything which came from your pen, and was a reflex of your mind, would interest me; but when I can succeed in separating my judgment from my partiality, I know that this book is not so well-conceived or written as the 'Quarry of Fate,' and I believe that you are capable of doing far better than either."

This was not a very encouraging address for an author who thirsted to hear himself pronounced a genius, to listen to; but it was nothing to what I suffered a few weeks later at the hands of the professional critics, who used their scalping-knives so liberally upon my unfortunate volumes, that after reading the reviews I could never regard my work in the same light as I had done before.

It was "foolish," it was "fast," it was a bad imitation of the lowest and worst school of French literature. My heroine was picked to pieces; my hero chopped into mincemeat; my story pronounced to have been hastily composed (which was untrue) and hastily written, (to which assertion I could not give so flat a denial.) Almost everything which had been said in order to praise my first book was now contradicted in order to condemn my second; and one paper in particular, which on that occasion had prophesied that I should rival, if not excel the talent of my father, was now most virulent in my abuse, and averred that I was an example of the fallacy of the saying that "like begets like." This was the notice that most affected me: that they should revile myself, was perhaps natural, and, at all events, possible to bear; but that they should make my shortcomings the occasion for dragging in my dead father's

name, and holding up my attempts in derisive comparison with his, had power to make me tremble with impotent rage. Many other criticisms appeared, but almost all unfavourable. I could not imagine but that some secret enemy had been at work to do me this wrong. I felt as though I were standing alone, against a pitiless shower of stones, without a shelter for my bare and unprotected head.

My friends, for the most part, behaved as friends usually do in such emergencies; they had all perceived the very same faults in my book that the papers pointed out, and had thought it a great pity from the commencement that I had introduced such and such a subject, or wound up in such and such a manner.

They were also very attentive in sending me copies of the newspapers in which the most scurrilous reviews appeared, so that I sometimes received as many as half a dozen "Revilers" by the morning's post, and four or five "Stingers" by the evening, generally accompanied by a note in which the sender expressed his sorrow at the "unseemly attack," although, as he always thought, it certainly would have been better, &c. These shafts usually came from one of the Estcourt bows, and I may have flushed under their ill-nature, but nothing more. They were but pin-pricks after the real wound which my vanity had received. I am sure I thought of Ada's disappointment as much as of my own. I had so hoped to make her proud of me, and now she would be ashamed. This idea possessed me to that degree that for days after the worst reviews appeared I did not go near her house. But at last my longing for sympathy overcame my false pride, and I found my way to Kensington. Her first words were an inquiry for the reason of my unusual absence.

"Where have you been, Gerald; out of town? I have expected to see you every day this week, and almost began to be afraid that something was the matter. You have not been ill, have you? yet now I look, you are certainly paler than usual."

"I have only been worried, Ada; so worried that I did not like even to come here," I answered, throwing myself into a chair. "These wretched reviews—but I suppose you can scarcely have seen them?"

"I have read them all, Gerald."

"Have you! a pleasant dose, weren't they? You see you were right in your judgment, Ada, and I had better have turned my attention to farming than to literature. A plough-share is a fitter implement for me, I fancy, than a pen."

I suppose I spoke bitterly, for she drew nearer to me, and took my hand: it was hot, and feverish.

"And is it possible, dear Gerald, that a few unfavourable reviews can have the power to affect you like this? Why, your hand is burning, and you look as if you had scarcely slept since I saw you last."

"No more I have," I answered. "I have scarcely slept or ate. The thought of those vile attacks follows me wherever I go, and turns my life into a hell."

"Oh, Gerald! you must care for the good opinion of the world far more than I do. Nothing could have the effect upon me which you mention except it came through those I love. You will never be fit for a public life if you are so sensitive to every rebuff."

"I could bear rebuffs, Ada, but I cannot bear to be publicly abused and reviled, and to know that such reports have found their way into every house in Britain, and been read by friend and foe. When a man insults me I know how to answer him, but for these cowardly paper attacks there is nothing to be done. I can only, as the saying is, 'grin and bear it.' But I have found the task so difficult that they have robbed me of all my peace, and made me afraid to show my face anywhere, even at Kensington."

"That is very foolish," she replied, "and very wrong. If you are sick or sorry, Gerald, to whom should you come, but me?"

"But are you not ashamed of me, Ada?"

"Ashamed of you, and why?"

"Because of these horrid reviews."

"Do you think they have altered my private opinion about your book? I told you what I thought of it when I first read it. I believe you can do better, but it is far above the average."

"But the 'Reviler' says it is far below it, Ada; that they are doubtful whether the plot exceeds the writing in folly, or the writing exceeds the plot in weakness of execution."

She gave an impatient movement with her foot.

"You speak of the 'Reviler' in the plural, Gerald, as if its reviews were written by a body of competent men ; whereas, as likely as not, your book has fallen into the hands of a rival novelist. But even supposing your critic to be a sensible man, and his opinion unbiassed, one swallow does not make a summer."

"But almost all the reviews are bad," I exclaimed despairingly.

"I acknowledge that they are, and some of them unfairly so ; but the principal papers being against you, the smaller ones take their cue from them. However, what I want to impress upon you is, that if you have really the ability to write, no amount of bad reviews can rob you of it. They may retard your success, but eventually you will succeed. Neither do I believe they have the power imputed to them of making or marring a book. I am not a writer, but I am a reader, and the bystanders are said to see most of the game. I know that I have never been deterred from the perusal of a new work by an unfavourable review ; neither, I believe, have any of my friends ; indeed I think that the more they are abused, the more they are read. We have proof of this in some of the most popular novelists of the present day, whose books gain the widest circulation and the loudest blame ; and I remember my father telling me how he has known your father laugh till the tears ran down his face as he read what he called 'a regular slasher' upon one of his own productions. 'If these fellows only knew,' he used to say, 'that they've given me a better lift upwards than a page full of flattery could effect !'"

I had heard this story of my father before, but it had slipped my memory ; now I felt grateful to her for having recalled it to me.

"Then you do not despair about my yet doing something worthy of my father's name, Ada ?—you would not advise me to relinquish my hopes of succeeding as a writer ?"

"Relinquish your hopes !—what, give it up altogether ? My dear Gerald, what are you thinking of ?"

"But if I am to be abused like this each time," I said, "I shall never get on. I feel now as if I could not write again. I have done my best, and the best has been pronounced very bad indeed. So what's the good of trying any more ?"

She looked at me for a moment in sheer surprise at my weakness ; and the smile with which shê answered my question had a *souçon* of pity mingled with its love.

"And did you really expect to succeed all at once ; to find the road to fame strewn with nothing but flowers ; to encounter no drawbacks, no difficulties by the way ; to gain, in fact, by one effort what other men have toiled for years to obtain ? I could scarcely have believed it of you. You wish to be enrolled as a disciple of the highest art. Would it be the highest if it was open to every one ? I am afraid, Gerald, you have been flattering yourself with the idea that if your father's mantle has fallen upon you, you will be able to attain the position which he enjoyed without the labour by which he earned it. Now, let us try and analyse why your book has failed ; for, however hard criticism may be, public opinion is not generally unjust. Is not what some of the newspapers say true, that you wrote it too fast ?"

" 'Slovenly composition, half-finished plot, and ungrammatical writing,' " I said, quoting one of the sentences which were burnt in upon my memory.

"Come, never mind that," rejoined Ada, playfully ; "we will forget the *Stinger*, Gerald, now I am going to be your critic. But I think your book *was* written too fast, and whilst you were thinking of other things."

"Here is my excuse, then," I said, winding my arm about her, for her sense and sweetness were winning me out of my evil humour. But Ada would not allow that she was any excuse for my shortcomings.

"When a man has once adopted his profession," she said, gravely, "he should make it his first object in life—nothing should be permitted to precede it. 'The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart, sword, gown, gain, glory'—these are the thoughts which should be first with men, last with women. Who does not blame the man who loses a battle, sinks a ship, neglects a parish, or wastes a fortune, and pleads his love, anxiety, or fear for a woman in excuse for his failure of duty ? No, Gerald ! say you were too confident, too indolent, or too fearless of consequences to apply yourself heart and soul to your work ; but do not lay the blame on me. I would have been the first to urge you to closer application, had I but known it."

"I believe you would, but the fact remains; from whatever cause it may have arisen, I have undeniably failed. Why, just look at the difference between the reviews upon this book and those on the 'Quarry of Fate.' My mind was just as preoccupied then, Ada, and with the same object too, yet nothing could have been received more favourably than it was."

"You were labouring under disappointment then, Gerald; but you had received what you considered a final answer to your suit. This book was written whilst you were still in a state of suspense and uncertainty—a very unfortunate mood under which to attempt composition. However, may not the criticisms upon the 'Quarry of Fate' have been partly influenced by the fact of its being your first attempt; also of your father being still alive and popular amongst us? A second work invariably receives a harsher judgment, because the reviewers look for improvement, and oftener find deterioration; and you must not forget that now you stand alone. I have often heard that it is the most unfortunate thing for an author to receive much flattery at the onset of his career. He finds, as he imagines, the road to success so easy that it makes him careless. He leaves off taking pains, and if he eventually succeeds, it is through much tribulation. I know that these paper attacks are very hard to bear, Gerald, but you may turn their abuse into use if you so choose. Instead of permitting them to discourage you, resolve to make your future give their prophecies the lie; let the sharpness of their censure sting you into action; make you put your shoulder to the wheel, and, thinking of nothing but the power within you, *determine* to succeed."

"Will you be proud of me if I do, Ada?"

"Not prouder than I am now," she answered fondly. "Your love is what makes my pride, Gerald, not your talent."

"Have I any?"

"Plenty, if you choose to dig for it; but talent is like ore; that which takes the least trouble to procure is generally the least valuable. Genius may be a great gift, but perseverance is a greater; for perseverance can do many things without genius, but genius can do nothing without perseverance. We are too apt to lose sight of the truth that labour is necessary to all success." As she spoke thus to me, my dying father's

words came to my remembrance, and the Estcourt motto, "Labore vinces," which he had cautioned me not to forget. My spirits sunk again as I thought how disappointed he would have been, had he lived to see me so spoken against, and a deeper shadow stole over my face, which Ada, womanlike, was quick to see and to guess the cause of.

"Do not let us speak any more of it, dear Gerald ; the thing is past, we must try and forget it."

"I cannot forget it," I said gloomily ; "I have been too humiliated."

"Cannot I lighten it to you, dearest ?" she whispered.

"You lighten all things to me, Ada. You are my light, and my warmth, and my harbour of refuge, the sun of my existence and the hope of all my future." As indeed she was, and no other. But notwithstanding her most tender encouragements for me to take heart and shake myself free of my trouble, it was many weeks before I could lose the recollection (even for a moment) of the words in which my unfortunate book had been spoken of by the reviewing periodicals.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SLIP, BUT NOT A FALL.

WHEN I made that promise on the occasion of my engagement to Ada Penryhn, to let my motto, with respect to my fidelity to herself, be "All or none," I did it with an honest determination to keep my word, nor had I considered the condition a hard one to fulfil. I had arrived at an age when music-halls, cafés, and other places that drive their trade by night, had lost with their novelty the power to charm me, and I was only too glad to pass my evenings at the houses of my friends and in respectable society. To continue on intimate terms, however, with my many bachelor acquaintances without joining their schemes of pleasure as heretofore, I did not find so easy. It was impossible for me to tell them the stringent reason for which I desired to live quietly ; and if from any

backwardness to consent to their invitations they ever guessed it, I was sure to be assailed by the argument, "Come, old fellow, you're not married yet, you know," and laughed at for being "owned by somebody," until, however much I loved my fetters, I felt that they were on me.

I believed that I could be faithful to her "in the spirit as well as the letter," did she but trust me ; and the idea of not being trusted would make me sometimes vote her as unreasonable as the rest of her sex. The truth is, I wanted to be both bound and free ; bound to her and she to me, by a link which no man should dare to think of severing ; but free to go where I listed, judged by my conscience only. I wanted, in fact, to serve both God and mammon, and the task seemed as easy to me as it does to others—before they have tried it. The laughter of my cousins was about the hardest thing I was called upon to bear ; but to a mind sensitively alive to ridicule, it was not the trifle it may seem to some, particularly as, having once discovered my hesitation to mix in the company they revelled in keeping, they took a mischievous delight in trying to entrap me into joining their parties of pleasure, and at times so far succeeded, that I had no means of withdrawing from the engagement, without almost confessing my reason for doing so. I was too old, and I trust too sensible, to allow them to persuade me into yielding against my will and better judgment ; but constant battling with their arguments fretted my temper, for no man likes to acknowledge that he is under coercion to the other sex. If the terms of my condition with Ada Penryhn had permitted my joining in their amusements, they would have been the first themselves, as men of honour, to condemn my indulgence in any further dissipation ; but not even to join, was, in their eyes, going a step too far ; it was entering the lists of married men before my time, writing myself down already as having gone out from amongst them, and become separate.

One morning, in the early part of June, George Lascelles strolled into my room, and asked me if I would accompany his brother and himself to dine at Richmond on the following afternoon.

"Who is going?" I demanded, with my newly-acquired caution.

"Only ourselves and a few other fellows," he said, care-

lessly ; " Jack is going to drive down tandem with a friend of his, and I'll take the other seat in your cab, if you'll let me."

" Yes, if I go," I answered.

" Now, Jerry, my boy, I won't take any excuse ; *la belle fiancée* must give you a holiday for once in a way, for I expect you will not get many after this season." And indeed I expected the same, though with very different feelings from those which were expressed in the compassionate tones of my cousin.

" I cannot possibly give you an answer yet," I said, " for I am not quite sure whether I made an engagement to Ada for to-morrow evening or not. There was some talk of our going to the opera."

George immediately consigned the opera to a place of torture.

" You can go there any night," he said, contemptuously ; " do get off it, Jerry, and come with us."

" I will if I can," I answered, cheerfully.

Yet as I rode to Kensington that afternoon, I rather hoped that I should not. A quiet evening at the opera with Ada was a great enjoyment to me ; and I was not always sure how George's bachelor entertainments would turn out. He was a very good fellow, and a perfect gentleman ; but he had never been much addicted to ladies' society, and his most indulgent friends could not but call him wild.

But as I entered Ada's drawing-room, walking in unannounced, as I was privileged to do, a sight met my eyes which was always unpleasant to them ; nothing less than the form of Thomas Logan lounging on the sofa, and looking as if he had settled himself there for an afternoon's enjoyment. It was not the first time by several that I had caught him in the company of my betrothed ; and although I could say nothing to his paying her an occasional visit, he knew as well as I did whether I liked to see him there. The fact of his so often obtruding upon her presence had considerably lessened the cordiality which had been recently established between himself and me ; and we seemed to have once more returned to our normal condition of mutual aversion. As I made my appearance on the afternoon in question, he entirely dropped the conversation he had been carrying on with Ada, and after lingering until he was convinced there was no chance of my

vacating the field before himself, rose awkwardly, and took his leave. The door had scarcely closed behind him before I exclaimed—

“What on earth makes you admit that fellow, Ada? I hate the sight of him!”

She looked at me in pure surprise.

“My dear Gerald, how could I refuse to see him, when he is your own cousin?—beside, they have been so kind to me; I have just promised to go over to Sydenham to-morrow, and spend the day with his mother?”

“Have you?” I replied, with more vexation than I chose to exhibit.

“Yes; and she has sent me such a beautiful present! only look here,”—and she showed me one of those large wicker baskets painted in white and gold, which are used for holding flowers, and which contained several plants of delicate hot-house roses, their pots carefully concealed by green moss.

“I was admiring these baskets in Mrs Logan’s presence only the other day,” continued Ada, “and inquired the price of them, but they were so dear that I would not buy one. Was it not kind of her to remember it?”

“Very kind, my dear! it is more than she has done for my sisters or myself. I am sure she has never given us anything; I am quite astonished at her liberality, and at a loss to account for the reason.”

“Oh, she can only have done it with a view to please you, Gerald; she knows so little of myself. But I do not think the roses were *her* present. Mr Thomas Logan did not exactly say so, but I fancy he had the basket filled before he brought it here.”

This information did not by any means tend to increase my satisfaction. I had made it my business and pleasure, since my engagement to Ada, to see that her rooms should always be well supplied with flowers, both cut and otherwise, and I considered it a piece of impertinence on the part of Mr Thomas Logan or Mr Anybody Else, to intrude upon my especial province; and I was jealous that she should accept the attention or appear pleased with it.

“Oh, he did, did he?” I remarked: “I am glad he was so happy as to think of such a thing, and that you seem so perfectly to appreciate his offering.”

She looked at me for a moment, as if not quite sure whether I was in jest or earnest, and then she said, inquiringly—

“You will come with me to Sydenham to-morrow, Gerald?”

“I can’t, thank you; I have an engagement.”

Her countenance fell.

“Oh, I am so sorry. I made sure you would be able to accompany me. Where are you going?”

“To Richmond, to dine with the Lascelles’ ”

I had been too proud (since she had apparently forgotten it) to mention our half-engagement for the opera; but as soon as I heard that she had pledged herself to spend the day with the Logans, I determined that I would join my other cousins.

“And you can’t give it up?”

“I have no wish to give it up, Ada. The Logans are no favourites of mine; I am quite out of my element at Sydenham, and I am sure you will not miss me whilst you have such a gentleman as my cousin Thomas to dangle after you.”

Her eyes, full of tender reproof, were raised to mine.

“If I were not *certain* that you can be only joking, Gerald, I could almost be angry with you for speaking so foolishly.”

“Foolishly or not, my dear Ada, you must manage to go to Sydenham without me, for I shall be a dozen miles in the other direction.”

“I dare say it is just as well,” she said quietly, “for Mrs Logan has asked me to take Willie, and I know you do not like to travel in the company of babies.”

“Oh, by heavens, no!” I exclaimed; “under the circumstances, I wonder you asked me.”

It was an unkind thing to say, because I knew that she had never quite recovered the little disappointment she had felt at the evident dissatisfaction I had displayed upon first learning that she was a mother. She changed the subject suddenly after my last remark, and we talked of other things. Yet the visit was not a happy one, and our farewell was less tender than usual. I did not see her again before she started for Sydenham, and at four o’clock the next afternoon I was driving my cousin George down to Richmond, not feeling particularly happy, but defiantly determined to be so.

We had nearly reached our destination, when I happened

to remark to him how intimate I had become with every object on the road.

"They really should invent some fresh places to dine at," I said; "I have been to Richmond so often that I am sick of it."

"So am I," he replied; "but women always prefer Richmond to Greenwich."

"We have no women of the party, to-day," I rejoined, quickly.

George bit his lip as if he was conscious of having let the cat out of the bag.

"I thought you told me yesterday there was to be no one but ourselves and a few other fellows," I said, in a tone of vexation.

"Well," he replied, hesitatingly, "I didn't invite any; but Jack said something about Charlestown and himself bringing down some of their friends."

He looked wistfully in my face, as if expecting an answer from me, but I made him none. I was annoyed at his intelligence: I knew what sort of friends Master Jack was likely to take down with him, and I guessed that they had all combined to play a trick upon me. George did not like my silence; and presently he added, almost apologetically—

"I say, old fellow, I'm very sorry about it; but you won't be such a fool as to turn back or to be angry, will you?"

I had felt half inclined to do the former, simply because I did not choose to be duped by them; but a thought of Ada at Sydenham, waited on by my red-headed cousin, flashed into my mind, and I vented my indignation upon the flanks of my horse instead.

"You need not be afraid," I answered, "I have agreed, and I will go through it; but I must say, George, I think *you* are getting rather too old to lend your countenance to such boyish tricks. Knowing my wishes, you might have told me beforehand."

Here our conversation on the subject dropped, and a few minutes afterwards we drew rein at the door of the hotel, though not before the rest of the party had arrived. As soon as I joined it, I perceived that my surmise was correct. The lady guests were such as accept the invitation of bachelors, and receive them from no one else, and consisted of four or

five pretty faces picked up behind the scenes of the Opera and elsewhere : what others could I have expected to meet in such hair-brained company ! Unfortunately, however, for myself, I happened to be, or to have been, personally acquainted with most of them : I was therefore soon taken forcible possession of, and rallied into complimenting, and teased into flirting, in atonement for my late heavy sins in having avoided their society, whilst Jack and his madcap friends took delight in urging them on to try and make me account for having deserted my old haunts and abandoned my old ways.

To resist the storm of questions by which I was assailed was naturally a task of difficulty : my fair opponents attacked me on every side, until they had driven me into a corner, to escape from which I was compelled to make myself agreeable, and turn the subject to that of their own charms ; a never-failing method when you wish to make women forget any other.

But my *ruse* could not succeed without my permitting them to imagine that I meant what I said ; and when we sat down to dinner I had one of the prettiest girls in the room on either side of me, each equally certain that I admired her the most. It was treason to let a thought of Ada cross my mind in such companionship, yet it had possession of me throughout the festivities. Above the mirth and laughter by which I was surrounded, and in which I joined, the idea of what *she* would say could she but see me there rose perseveringly. I knew that I was breaking the promise I had made to her ; that such as this were the scenes which she had condemned ; and whilst I resolved that I would leave the party as soon as ever the dinner was concluded, I cursed the weakness which had permitted me to join in it even so far.

The farrago of nonsense with which I responded to the lively rattle of my neighbours on either side had no power to quell these reflections for a moment ; they overbalanced all my attempts at gaiety ; and in order to conceal them from the observation of others, I talked fast, and drank deeply. When dessert was placed on the table, some of the company strolled into the hotel garden, which overlooked the river, whilst others, amongst which was myself, lingered over their wine. I was still at the height of my forced spirits, when I heard the voice

of Jack Lascelles, none the clearer for the modicum of liquor he had imbibed, remonstrating with some one outside.

"Oh! come in, old fellow! what's the use of not coming in? Jerry's with us. Jerry will be delighted to see you; do come in."

And in another minute he appeared before the open glass doors, dragging Joshua Estcourt after him, looking exceedingly sheepish, and unwilling to join the party. I was surprised at the sight, for the Lascelles only knew Joshua as a cousin of mine; but I opined rightly that if Master Jack had been quite himself, he would not have been so eager to insist upon the acceptance of his impulsive invitation.

"Look here, Jerry," he said, in explanation; "I found your cousin outside there! make him sit down, and have a glass of wine, there's a good fellow; we can take him back in the drag, you know; there's lots of room. Now, Estcourt, make yourself at home;" and having discharged the duties of hospitality, Jack flew off to resume his stroll in the garden.

"What brings you here this evening?" I asked, not over cordially, I confess, of the new comer. His foolish face reddened, and, in his confusion, it appeared to me that he blurted out the truth without intending to do so.

"Oh! I don't know; nothing particular!" he stammered. "I heard from Logan that you were down here, and I just came to see what you were all about."

The idea at once struck me, was it possible that I could be watched? and, absurd as it seemed, I could not dismiss it. Ada, I knew, was above exercising such unworthy *espionage*, and who else had any interest in doing so? Yet the bare question was sufficiently irritating to cause all my good resolutions to leave Richmond early to fade away as if by magic. My pride rose up in arms; and I determined that whoever had enlisted Joshua Estcourt in his service should learn that I was not a man to be frightened into walking in the straight path. Under this resolve, my answer to my cousin's remark was as stern as if I had convicted him of the supposed intention.

"Thank you. Next time I require your *surveillance* I will let you know. Shall we go into the garden?"

The question was addressed to one of the girls who had sat next me during dinner, and, on her assent, we rose, and left

Joshua Estcourt to entertain himself. When we returned to coffee, he was gone.

"Where's your cousin, Jerry?" demanded Jack, whose articulation had become still further affected by the evening air.

"I don't know," I replied, "and I don't care. What made you bring him in, Jack?"

"I found him loitering about the garden, and I thought it must be deuced slow work, so I asked him to come and take a glass of wine with us. Queer fellow, isn't he? always blushing."

Here there arose a peal of contemptuous laughter from the women, who are ever quick to ridicule any man who systematically aspires to rob them of their heavenly prerogative to blush.

"He is a greater fool than I take him for," I answered, warmly, "if he came down here on any business but his own. Yet I can't help thinking he had a particular object in view. We're not the boys to submit to a spy in the camp, are we, Jack?"

"I should rather think not, Jerry. By the way, you won't return to town yet awhile, will you?"

"Not a moment before yourself, old chum."

"Hurrah! that's right. I hate having my enjoyment cut short; George said something about your going back at nine."

"George knows nothing about it," and I actually allowed my ruffled pride and equanimity to make me consent to Jack settling the time for our return, which he did not do until all the respectable hours had struck and been done with, and then I have strong reasons for believing that George Lascelles drove me home instead of my driving him. I know that I woke late on the afternoon of the succeeding day, feeling very guilty and very unwilling to show myself at Kensington; not that I thought Ada Penryhn would have heard of my dissipation, but that I feared I should not be able to face the inquiries she was sure to make, without betraying myself.

I was very foolish, but I had not yet learnt to deceive.

As the cool of the evening came on, however, I found my way there, but for the first time since I had been engaged to her, I was refused admittance. The woman who answered the door could not tell me if her mistress was ill or well; she had simply received orders to deny her to all visitors.

"Run up to Mrs Penryhn and tell her it is I."

The servants were all aware of the close tie which was about to unite us, and the smile with which my bidding was executed seemed to intimate that there was little doubt of the issue ; but if so, we were both too confident, for the only answer my message received was, that Mrs Penryhn was sorry she could not admit me that evening, as she was unequal to seeing any visitors. Under these circumstances, the excuse was so formal that I turned away from the door without further comment, but by the next day I concluded that perhaps it was the servant's mode of rendering the message which made it appear so, and in some anxiety for Ada's health called at the house again, with an inquiry concerning it.

"My mistress will see you to-day, sir," was the only answer I received. Delighted with the assurance, I sprang up-stairs, and found her in the drawing-room, a little pale perhaps, but otherwise looking just the same as usual. I was about to take the privilege which a day's absence generally gained for me ; but somehow, Ada had placed a table between us, and I could only press the hand she tendered me across it.

"How are you, dearest ?" I commenced ; "you were ill yesterday, were you not ? had one of your bad headaches I suppose, or were over-fatigued by your trip to Sydenham."

But Ada could not dissemble, even by insinuation.

"No ; I was neither," she replied ; "I could not see you, or any one, but it was not sickness that prevented me."

"I am thankful for that, at any rate ; how did you enjoy yourself at the Logans' ?"

Her features worked for a moment as though she was uncertain whether to weep or to be angry, and then she exclaimed—

"O Gerald, don't play with me ; you know what upset me yesterday ; you have broken your promise."

This sudden accusation took me so completely by surprise, that I could not have denied the fact to her, even had I wished to do so. I guessed at once through what source she must have heard the truth, but it was truth, and there was an end of it. I have no doubt I looked foolish, as I stood before her with my eyes on the ground, and spinning a tectotum of Willie's round and round upon the tiny table, but all I said was, "Who told you of it, Ada ?"

"That signifies little," she replied, "but I am at liberty to tell you : it was Mrs Logan."

"So I thought."

"But can you deny it, Gerald? that you went down to Richmond the day before yesterday, in company, the avoidance of which was the condition of your engagement to me, and that you did not return to Brook Street until the next morning?"

The teetotum spun away with so much energy that it fairly danced off the little table, and fell with a clatter amongst the fire-irons, as I gave vent to the first oath which had ever left my lips in her presence.

"Forgive me, Ada, but *who* is it that dares to watch my residence, and intrude upon my privacy in this manner?"

I was the more angry that, not having a very distinct idea of when I had returned home on that occasion, I could not refute the accusation as I would otherwise have done.

"I do not know," she replied; "all I can say is, that Mrs Logan came to see me yesterday morning, and told me that it was the case. I believe she quoted your cousin, Joshua Estcourt, as her authority, but I was so taken aback by the news that I can hardly remember. Is it true, Gerald? tell me that it is not so, and I will take your word against that of all the world."

I was silent.

"Then it *is*," she said, bitterly, "and I am not worth even so much to you."

"You are above all value to me, Ada," I exclaimed; "only hear my version of the story. It is true that I dined at Richmond in the company of a few little *coryphées*, but when I told you of my intention to do so, I had no knowledge of whom the party was to consist."

"But when you became aware of it?" she asked, anxiously.

"There lay my fault. I meant to have left directly after dinner, but Joshua Estcourt intruded on us and ruffled my temper, and altogether—I was drawn into it; you don't know how hard it is for a man, under such circumstances, to quit the society of women without having a good reason to give for doing so."

"Harder, apparently, than to wound the feelings of one

whom you have promised to marry," she said, in a tone of disappointment.

"Something is due to politeness, Ada."

"Yes, and something to me," she rejoined, "although you will find plenty of women, as you pass through the world, who will glory in making you forget it."

"Ada, your sex is ever unjust, both to one another and to us."

"Not to one another, Gerald, or at least I am not. I have the keenest sympathy with women, even such women as you dined with at Richmond. I can enter into all their feelings with regard to men; their desire to fascinate, their love of admiration, their pleasure in victory. It is our nature, implanted with our birth and growing with our growth; and you are our legitimate quarry. If you, as an engaged man, still mix in society as if you were free, are the women to blame, not being personal friends of mine, who attempt your capture? No honour is sacrificed on their side by their flirtation with you; it is only a fresh triumph gained; the fault, with the knowledge of your circumstances, rests with you."

"I did not flirt much, Ada; and if I had done so, it could not derogate from my loyalty to yourself. Men regard a flirtation with very different eyes to what women do: to them (when not accompanied by love) it is mere *badinage*, forgotten as soon as uttered. I might talk nonsense, such as that of the other evening, all my life, and not have deviated one step from the allegiance I owe to you."

"And were I to accept such *badinage* from others, Gerald, what then?"

"Oh, that would be a very different case," I retorted quickly; "you could not even think of such a thing without being somewhat lowered in my estimation."

"Nor can you without losing in mine," she answered, decidedly. "This is but another thread, Gerald, of that tangled web, social law, which neither you nor I shall ever live to see put right, but of the wrongs of which I am so much convinced, that I am determined I will never lend by acquiescence a helping hand to their continuance. It is this conviction that made me exact that promise from you of a quiet life as the condition of our engagement; it is this also which would urge me at any time to act against the laws of society, if by that

means I could help a woman oppressed, where a man would go free."

"It is all very well to think so," I replied; "others have thought it before you; but if you were put to the test you would find how hard it is to act counter to social law, in the teeth of the scandal and detraction which you would meet at the hands of your respectable friends."

"Try me!" she said, with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes, looking ready to commence her assault upon the world.

"I trust you will never be so tried, Ada; I should be very sorry to see you in such a position. Society may be imperfect, but her rules are like those of the Medes and Persians, they alter not nor are they to be transgressed with impunity."

"Then you have nothing but excuses to make for yourself, Gerald," she continued, sadly. "You do not consider that if you feel no sorrow for giving me pain, the same thing may happen again; and it were best, perhaps, that I released you at once from a promise which can only gall you, and make your life tiresome instead of pleasant."

"Release me, Ada! what! from my engagement to you?"

"If I release you from one, it must be from both, Gerald. I cannot retract the terms of my condition, '*All or none.*'"

"Oh, take *all*, Ada!" I exclaimed, horror-struck at her proposal; "make me your own, and my fancy even shall never wander from where you are."

She smiled at my ardour, but she placed her hand in mine, and I knew that the time of my forgiveness was drawing near.

"That is a very common mistake, Gerald," she said, in answer to my last assertion, "but it has proved itself false too often. Marriage will not alter your nature nor your tastes; it may divert them for a little while, but, the novelty past, they will return in full force. I must have some better proof that you will be content with a domestic life, than your merely thinking so, before we settle down together."

I thought her cruel and prosaic and hard of belief, and I told her so; but she was not moved by any of my reproaches.

"It is for both our sakes," she said, gently. "If our happiness proved to be fallacious, you would suffer, dearest, as much as myself. Show me that you are above temptation, that you are not only able to see the right, but strong enough

to do it, and I shall have no fears for either you or myself."

"Then I am quite forgiven, dear Ada?"

She stooped down and pressed her lips upon my forehead. Her caresses meant more than those of most women, for she was slow to give and to accept them; but there was no mistaking the sincerity of this, and I felt that it was the medium of a full and free pardon.

After a little of the happy converse which usually follows the healing of a lovers' breach, my thoughts reverted to the means by which Ada had been informed of my peccadillo, and I told her that I intended to resent the interference of the Logans in my affairs by dropping their acquaintance altogether. But this resolve I found, to my surprise, instead of meeting with her approval, only served as the occasion for further reproof to myself.

"I think you would be exceedingly unwise to make a quarrel of it," she said, "especially with such near relations. Had Mrs Logan's story been untrue, I should still have advised more forbearance; but since it was perfectly correct, what possible ground can you take up for offence?"

"Her ill-nature in repeating it," I answered; "she can but have done it with a view to injuring me in your good opinion."

But Ada, with all her sense, had not gained the same sort of experience as I had, and she could not conceive such ingrained malice as most of my father's family bore towards myself.

"Scarcely that, dear Gerald, though I allow she lost no time in telling me the news. Still, I had expressed anxiety about you the evening before, and she had some shopping to do in town that morning. Let us accredit her with the best motive we can, and lay her promptitude partly to a wish to gratify my curiosity, and partly to a feminine love of gossip."

"Lay it to what you will, Ada, it is on a piece with their behaviour to me since my birth. I will not make an open quarrel of this, since you desire otherwise; but I shall be very cool with Mrs Logan from this time forward, and if you love me you will be the same."

It was the worst step I could have advised her to take, both for my interest and her own, for, whilst our decrease of

cordiality was visible enough to render the Logans more strongly disposed against us, the terms on which we continued were not sufficiently altered to prevent our occasional meeting. By this means, whilst I kindled a fresh resentment in the breast of my aunt and her family, I adopted no measures by which the indulgence of it might be restrained.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MIDNIGHT MEETING.

It was a very quiet month with me that succeeded the little episode of the Richmond dinner. Under a promise of secrecy, I unburdened my breast to my cousins, the Lascelles; told them of the scrape into which I had fallen, and begged them to desist from entrapping me further; and once convinced that I had solid reason for my abstinence, they proved the friends to me they had ever been. I joined few bachelors' parties during that time, and none of the respectability of which I was not assured; but I was happier notwithstanding, if less gay, than I ever remember to have been before. I met Ada at several dinner-parties, balls, and other fashionable assemblies; and was never weary of listening to the comments passed upon her personal and mental charms. I have purposely avoided, in these pages, giving a minute description of the perfections of my betrothed, because I feel I might only convey a wrong impression of her by the attempt, and that, without such fear, a woman's lover is not the proper person to paint her portrait. That she was beautiful I trust my readers will accredit me sufficient good taste to believe; that she was virtuous and sensible, the details of her life afford the best proof. I watched at this period, with the deepest interest and pleasure, the increasing influence which she gained over the members of my own family. Emmeline, who corresponded regularly with her and myself, could never say enough in praise of Ada's sentiments and feelings; Beatrice was fain to acknowledge that the future Mrs Estcourt was as discreet

as she was pretty ; and even Gertrude took an opportunity to say she regretted the letter she had sent me on the occasion of my engagement ; for, that the more she saw of my choice, the more she approved it. Yes ! that was a happy month, free from all jars and misunderstandings : how often I looked back upon it afterwards, and wondered I had ever found enjoyment in pleasures less innocent ! It was the first of July, the anniversary of Ada's twenty-third birthday : I was to have a *tête-à-tête* dinner with her at Kensington. I took my way there, in capital spirits, for I carried with me the prettiest of all pretty sets of diamonds and opals for her acceptance, and was pleasing myself with the anticipation of her pleasure. Neither had I forgotten little Willie, for I knew that I could not earn the mother's gratitude better than by remembering the child ; and somehow, the recollection of the handful of baby purchases which I ordered to be sent him on that day has lingered to give me satisfaction whilst more important things have faded from my memory. As I flew up the now familiar staircase, Ada came out upon the landing to meet me. She was robed in white, without a single ornament, unless one richly-scented tea-rose in her bosom can be called such. Her luxuriant hair, partly rolled around her head, and partly lying on her shoulders, formed a warm framework for her delicately-tinted face ; her sweet eyes overflowed with love and gratitude ; her firm cool hands clasped mine with a ready and perfect trust. So, in my latter dreams, have angels from heaven appeared to me !

"How good of you," she commenced "to think of baby ! Dear Gerald, how can I thank you enough ?"

"By not thanking me at all, Ada," I replied ; "for if you will let me hang these trifles upon your neck and arms, I shall owe a heavy debt of gratitude to you, instead."

I placed the case of ornaments in her hands as I spoke, and she opened and regarded them ; but although her admiration of the beauty of the stones and workmanship was evident, no deeper feeling gleamed in her eyes than had been conjured there by the reception of little Willie's horse and Noah's ark.

"Let me put them on you, dearest," I said.

She submitted to the adorning without demur—only, as I stepped backwards to observe the effect of the jewels flashing

in her pretty ears and on her fair throat and arms, and whispered to her whether nature or art looked the most beautiful to me, she clasped her hands over mine and said—

“They are very handsome, but you are a naughty boy to spend so much money on me; you know I should have received a bouquet of flowers from you with quite as much pleasure”—and I verily believe she was sincere.

Presently we sat down cosily to dinner, in an apartment fourteen feet by twelve, and with a single maid-servant to attend to our wants. But I gazed at Ada over a damask-covered table, which was so decorated with flowers that there was scarcely room for anything else; good wine was sparkling in cut glass close to my hand; the champagne in its ice-pail lay at a convenient distance, and my lady insisted that it would do me all the good in the world for once to wait upon myself. Whether the charm of that birthday dinner consisted in its novelty, or whether seeing Ada seated opposite to me roused my anticipations of coming happiness, I cannot say, but I know it was the pleasantest meal of which I had ever partaken. I must have allowed my feelings to get the better of my prudence, for we had not been long at table before she took me gravely to task for showing so much levity before the servant.

“This is the first time I have ever played hostess to you, Gerald,” she said, frowning at me playfully, “and I really think you might behave a little better.”

“I hope it won’t be the last, though,” was my disobedient answer, “or perhaps we shall play it as a duet next time, Ada.”

“I had a visitor this morning,” she said, changing the subject, “and a gentleman visitor too. You’ll never guess who he was.”

“Then it is of no use my trying, dear.”

“He is well known to yourself, though; a near relative into the bargain.”

“Not George Lascelles?”

“Oh, no!—a stranger. What do you say to uncle Jabez?”

“Never, Ada! you are joking.”

“I am not indeed. If my attention had been less occupied with your presents and your nonsense, I should have told you before. He walked in at eleven o’clock. Only

fancy, what an hour to make a formal call ! I was thunder-struck when Mary came and told me a gentleman wanted to see me at that time. I thought it could only be you or the tax-gatherer"——

"Thank you for linking our names," I interposed.

"But when I descended to the drawing-room, there was uncle Jabez examining the *étagères*. I knew him directly from your description."

Here we both laughed so heartily that the maid-servant looked as if she thought we must have gone, in her own parlance, 'off our heads.'"

"And what did he say to you, Ada ? What reason did he give for coming ?"

"Oh, he only called to make my acquaintance. I think it was most *avuncular* of him. We sat together for more than half an hour, though I cannot say we talked much, but the little we said was to the purpose. I asked him if he did not think the weather was very warm ; but he grunted so terrifically at that, that I did not venture to open my mouth again for a few minutes, at the end of which he inquired at what school I had placed my boy ; and when I replied that Willie had only just learned to walk, so I had not yet thought of taking that step, he went off in such a series of grunts that I was quite frightened ; and I don't think we exchanged another sentiment until he suddenly got up from his chair, gave a final growl for a good-bye, and walked out of the room. Pray don't laugh so, my dear Gerald, or you will make yourself ill."

"That is just like uncle Jabez," I exclaimed ; "his speech is as rough as his appearance. I wonder what the old bear thought of you, Ada. I should like to have seen you together. You must have looked like Beauty and the Beast."

"I do not think him so ugly," she replied. "He certainly does not trust to dress to improve his personal appearance, but he has a fine head and face, and his manner, though shockingly blunt, has a genuine ring about it."

"Yes, and does not belie itself," I answered. "Uncle Jabez is sterling—I am convinced of that. He is my father, without my father's polish."

We finished our dinner, and went up-stairs again, and soon

after little Willie was brought in to bid good-night to his mother.

"Do not leave him, nurse," said Ada to his attendant.

She always gave this order when I was present, betraying thereby that a different course was pursued in my absence. But I was too happy on that occasion to be ungracious.

"No! let him stay," I pleaded. "I want to have a game with the little fellow."

The mother's eyes filled with pleasure as I announced my desire, and she dismissed the servant without further ceremony. The little boy had now reached a very interesting age; he was nearly two years old, and his infantine ways and prattle were amusing to watch and listen to. He had become used to my company also, and was as familiar with me as with his mother. To please her, I now laid myself out to please the child, and we were soon engaged in some noisy romps, to the great peril of the various stands of ornaments with which the room was decorated.

When he was at last dismissed to bed, I threw myself, tired out, upon the sofa, and Ada came and sat in a low chair beside me.

"How kind you are to allow Willie to tease you in this way," she whispered, as she passed her hand over my heated forehead.

"Why so, Ada?" I asked, turning my head towards her; "shall I not stand in the position of a father to him one of these days?"

She smiled and blushed, but answered nothing. I caught the hand which was wandering amongst my hair, and held it prisoner.

"How soon is it to be, Ada? This is the first of July, and I don't want to lose my shooting this year. Don't you think that a wedding about the first of August would wind up the season very nicely, and just leave us a month in which to go abroad before we settle down at Grasslands for the winter?"

This speech was made half in jest and half in earnest, but I knew that she could separate the wheat from the chaff, and that she was too true and unaffected to refuse me an answer.

"Shall it be this time next month, dearest?" I repeated. I was looking up into her face as I lay, and I watched the warm blood creeping through her veins as she considered my

proposal. "Make up your mind, Ada; is it so unpleasant a question to decide?"

She shook her head, and laughed.

"Yes or no, then?"

"If you wish it, Gerald."

"Really and truly, darling," I exclaimed, joyfully, leaping off the sofa.

"Really and truly! when I promised to be yours, did I make any conditions but one? My fears are dissolving, Gerald; I trust you, and believe you worthy of my trust."

My rapture at her assurance almost caused her wonder. She placed too little faith in her powers of fascination; she could not value the gift of herself at the high price that I did. For the remainder of the evening I was in a perfect turmoil of delight; I could neither think nor speak of anything but my anticipated marriage; so much so, that at last Ada warned me that nothing was certain in this world.

"Not certain!" I exclaimed; "why, what can come between us? In the possession of your love, dearest, I would defy misfortune to her face;" and I continued in the same state of excitement until I left her to walk home.

The night was close and warm, and I was heated and had no fancy for travelling in a cab. Yet to this hour I can recall her white-robed figure as she hung over the banisters and entreated me to let her send the servant to fetch one for me.

"No, thank you, Ada; a walk will do me good; I am too happy to sleep well without it. When can I see you to-morrow?"

"At any time you like. Will you come to luncheon?"

"Without fail. Good-night, my dearest."

The servant was waiting to close the door after me; the sweet face gazing over the banisters looked the blessing she would not speak before another; and with a farewell upward glance, I passed the threshold and commenced to skirt the gardens on my way to Brook Street. Sauntering along with my cigar in my mouth and my hands in my pockets, and dreaming every event of the evening over again, I was blissfully content. For me, metaphorically speaking, were flowers springing from each crevice of the unyielding flag-stones upon which I trod; life lay stretched before me like a vast calm lake, upon which the waves of this troublesome world possessed no influence; and Ada seemed as indissolubly mine as if the pro-

spective vows had been pronounced between us. Governed by such feelings, I was not likely to accord much attention to what was passing around me ; yet the hour being late, and the pavement between Kensington and Piccadilly almost deserted, it was not long before I was forced to rouse myself to the consciousness that I was being tracked, by the pertinacity of some female, who, in breathless haste, passed me more than once, and then retracing her footsteps, met and regarded me fixedly. Still I went on, wrapt in my own thoughts, and taking little heed of her movements, until she stopped short before me, and the words, given hurriedly but with a perfect accent, "Mr Estcourt, allow me to speak to you," brought me likewise to a stand-still. By my pseudonym of "Jerry" I was universally known about town, but it greatly puzzled me to conjecture who could have thus learned to address me by my family name. My first thought was of Julia Sherman, but if the tones of the voice had not undeceived me, a pair of large black eyes flashing under the lamplight would soon have done so, and as I took off my hat, I intimated that in respect of our acquaintance she had the advantage of me.

"I know it," replied the stranger, "but you will recognise me directly you hear my name. I have watched for you very often and very long. I am glad we have met at last. I have much to say to you. You will come home with me!"

Her last words were delivered in a tone of mingled doubt and entreaty, and she made a movement as if she would lay her hand upon my arm. But I drew backwards, saying coldly—

"It is impossible. I have other business to attend to. I am going straight to my own house."

A shade of disappointment, visible enough at the distance she stood from me, passed over the woman's face.

"You will not come!" she exclaimed, "and when I have waited for this so long. You do not know what trouble I have taken to intercept you in your walks to and from Brook Street; how many evenings I have watched for hours but in vain; either you did not go to Kensington or you drove home. And now you refuse to listen to what I have to tell you."

I started again. This stranger, whoever she was, knew not only my name, but my place of residence, and that to which

my frequent visits were paid. I was not only surprised, I was angry.

"Who *are* you," I demanded, "that you appear to have made yourself so intimate with my private affairs? What is your business with me?"

"That is what I wish to tell you, Mr Estcourt, but I cannot tell you here. Come home with me, and you shall know all. Why do you hesitate? what is it that you fear?"

"I fear nothing from you," I answered, not too politely, "but I hate mysteries; if your business is honest, why not disclose it?"

The woman seemed to hesitate for a moment; then advancing a step nearer to me, she lowered her voice to a whisper—

"It concerns *Ada Penryhn*," she said, distinctly. "Now, will you come?"

In a moment she had aroused my keenest interest.

"What of her?" I exclaimed, in astonishment; "what right have you to use her name? to speak of her to me?"

"Come, and I will tell you," was the laconic answer.

"And you will not tell me here?"

"I cannot: my news is of too much importance."

I hesitated no longer. I felt that I was bound to hear by what authority this stranger had mentioned the name which was sacred to me. Having heard so much, I should hear her without further parley. In another moment I had called a cab, and we were rattling together over the noisy stones to the address which she gave me. There was no opportunity for converse during the period of transition, and I sat back in my corner of the vehicle, silent, but determined to keep to the resolution I had formed. The house to which she had invited me was situated in one of the streets at the back of Park Lane, and not far from my own residence. As I observed this, I wondered that my mysterious acquaintance had not embraced an occasion for speaking to me when I was nearer home. Little time, however, was left for speculation before we had arrived at the end of our journey; when, throwing down the fare, before I could anticipate her action, in what appeared to me a careless and indifferent manner, she ran up the steps, opened the door, and ushered me through a hall, into a well-furnished drawing-room. Then she turned, and

motioned me to a seat, and I saw by the lighted gas that she was a middle-aged woman, bearing the traces of having been beautiful, but out of whose countenance trouble, or a reckless life, had washed all present comeliness. She was tall and painfully slight : had a pale complexion, straight features, and luminous dark eyes, which instantly reminded me, either by shape or expression, of some I had seen, but of *whose* I had no conception. I perceived, however, that whatever her mode of living, she was undoubtedly a gentlewoman, yet I continued standing with my hat in my hand, and would not accept her offer of a chair.

"You have mentioned a name," I said, "in which I am interested, and you have intimated that the fact is known to you ; to learn from whom you can have obtained your information is the sole reason for which I have consented to accompany you here ; and I cannot stay longer than is needed to effect my purpose."

"Perhaps you will change your mind, Mr Estcourt, when you hear my story. Meanwhile I suppose I have no right to expect otherwise from you."

Yet there was a dash of bitterness infused in her words, and she passed her hand wearily over her furrowed forehead.

"I am all attention," I said, presently, wishing to recall her to the purpose for which I was there. She started nervously, crossed the carpet to where I stood, and laying her hand upon my arm, looked anxiously in my face.

"I have your promise of secrecy?" she asked.

"So far as it lies in my power to give it."

"But it *must* lie in your power, or my lips are closed, and you leave this house as ignorant of my identity as you entered it. Swear to me that you will not repeat to any one whatever I may say to you this night which concerns *myself*."

"Whatever relates to *yourself* I promise not to reveal."

"Not my name or place of residence ; not even the fact of my existence."

"Certainly not ; you have my word. I can have no interest in speaking of them."

I was burning with impatience to hear what she could possibly have to tell me respecting my betrothed ; I cared nothing for her name or herself, still less considered it likely I should ever wish to mention them again.

"I know you are a gentleman, Mr Estcourt," she replied, "and I will trust you. You have been surprised at my knowledge of yourself and Ada Penryhn; and you are curious to hear me say by what means I became acquainted with her name and yours. Am I not correct?"

"You are," I answered; "more than that, I am waiting to hear you tell me by what *right* you couple that lady's name with mine, or mention hers at all."

Suddenly the woman withdrew her hand from my arm, and used it as a covering for her face.

"I have no *right*, Mr Estcourt, oh! I have lost my right," she wailed; "*I am her mother!*"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNLUCKY GIFT.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "is it possible?"

Yet, as soon as she had spoken I was convinced of the truth of her assertion. Every tale that I had heard relative to the unfortunate Mrs Rivers immediately rushed upon my memory. My father's glowing accounts of her beauty; her daughter's faint but fond recollections of her personal appearance; the reminiscences of such of my friends as knew her when she was living under the protection of her husband, came back into my mind, and left me no room to doubt that it was indeed the victim of Lord Edward Grieves who stood before me. She was faded, it is true, and aged beyond her years; but it was a miserable shadow of Ada that I beheld; Ada, with darker eyes and hair, careworn and haggard; but still Ada in the expression of the dreamy gaze, the nervous mouth, and in the grace of the willowy figure.

The knowledge shocked me. The ill-disguised contempt with which I had regarded this unfortunate woman; the *brusquerie* with which I had addressed her, smote me with compunction; and eager to atone for my behaviour, I quickly left my position, and advanced to where, shrinking from the

surprise expressed in my exclamation, she had thrown herself into a chair.

"Mrs Rivers," I commenced, "forgive me for the rudeness I have unintentionally shown you. You should not have kept me so long in ignorance of your identity."

"It is of no consequence ; I have become used to repulsion from the world, and I could not have told you who I was until I had obtained your promise of secrecy."

"But why did you not write to me to Brook Street ? I would have visited you at any time."

"Would you ? Had I been aware of that I might have done so ; but being uncertain with what feelings you would regard such a request, I preferred to remain *incognita* until I knew that I was safe in revealing myself. But what matters it either way ? However brought about, my object is effected ; you are here, and good enough to say that you will listen to me ; thank you for both."

She held out her hand as she spoke—a small white hand, recalling that of some one else powerfully to my mind. I took it in mine, and remembering only that she was Ada's mother, carried it respectfully to my lips. Perhaps the action touched her ; perhaps it recalled a deference which was no longer hers ; for tears filled her dark eyes, and it was some minutes before she could resume the conversation.

"You have a kind heart, Mr Estcourt ; I thank God for it ! you will make a good husband to my child."

"And how do you know that I am to be her husband ?" I asked, curiously.

"How do I know it ? How do I know everything that concerns her, from the places she frequents, and the people she visits, to the colour of the ribbon which ties her baby's frock-sleeves ? Because I watch her actions—unknown to herself—day by day ; because my only pleasure lies in following her footsteps like a shadow whenever it is in my power to do so ; because in all this great city of London there is but one spot which possesses any interest for me, and that is, the house which contains my child."

In her excitement she had turned towards me and seized my hand, and her mournful eyes were gazing full into my own.

"Oh, Mr Estcourt !" she exclaimed, "have pity upon me

—tell me something of my daughter. I shall never press my lips upon her face again, remember ; never hear her voice call me by the name which I have forfeited : but you are with her every day ; you know her thoughts, and have her best affections lavished on you : out of your plenty, spare a little for my drought.”

“What shall I tell you ?” I said, moved beyond measure by the earnestness of her appeal.

“Tell me if she is *well*, if she is *happy*.”

“Perfectly so, I believe. Her appearance should convince you of the first, her heart tells me that she is the second.”

“And does she ever speak of *me*, Mr Estcourt ? has she any remembrance of me ? have you ever heard her take my name on her pure lips ?”

She put this question in a nervous, anxious manner, as if she dreaded to hear that she was quite forgotten. But I assured her that Ada often mentioned her, and always with regret ; and that the subject of her mother, whatever unpleasant recollections it evoked, was still a sacred one with her.

I did not tell her of the profound compassion which her daughter had expressed towards her sufferings, nor of the many tears which she had shed over their recital ; for as yet I knew nothing beyond the fact that she had been her father’s wife, and I dreaded lest a too glowing account of Ada’s sympathy might induce her to propose a meeting between them, to which the daughter’s heroic sense of duty would forbid her not to accede. I looked around the well-furnished room, and took in the many evidences of luxury by which it was filled ; I glanced at Mrs Rivers’s dress, which was everything that a gentlewoman’s need be ; and at her hands, which sparkled with rings ; and decided afresh that I could not be too careful in what I told her of Ada’s sentiments towards herself. I had too much manly feeling not to pity and refrain from condemning the unhappy mother before me, but I could not forget that her daughter was to be my wife.

“And you love her ?” she said, anxiously ; “you love her truly ; you will be a faithful husband to her, and a good father to her children ?”

I replied that, God helping me, that was what I hoped to be ; that my affection for Ada was very steady and sincere ;

and that my greatest wish was to do my duty to her in every respect.

Still Mrs Rivers did not appear satisfied.

"You will not wean her love from you by little and little?" she continued; "you will consult her wishes, and be patient with her weakness, and guard her from every possible danger?"

"I will, indeed," I replied; "the aim of my existence shall be to make her happy. I have never loved any woman but herself; I have never seen another whom I would ask to be my wife, and it is now four years since I first wished her mine. Depend upon it, when the prize is once within my grasp, I shall not easily let it go again."

"And when is the marriage to be?" was her next question.

"In a month," I answered, confidently, and with a joyful remembrance of the evening I had just passed at her side.

"Ah! so soon? Heaven bless her!" was the mother's prayer, and my heart echoed it. I had seated myself by this time, and patiently waited until the reverie into which Mrs Rivers had fallen after her last words should end. Presently she roused herself, and said hurriedly as she rang the bell—

"Pray forgive my forgetfulness, Mr Estcourt, but you will take something, will you not?"

To this offer I returned a decided negative, telling her how lately I had dined; but she would take no refusal to her hospitality, and soon afterwards a man-servant appeared bearing wine and other refreshments. The tray upon which they were carried was silver, and all other appointments were in keeping. I looked with a suspicious eye upon this display of comfort, and the pity which Mrs Rivers's first appeal had excited in my breast seemed to cool under the inspection.

"I am so glad to have seen you," she said, as we drew near the table together; "as soon as I heard that my daughter was engaged to be married again, and to the son of my old friend Parton Estcourt, I was anxious to make your acquaintance. I knew your father well."

"I am aware of it," I answered; "he has spoken of you to me."

The blush which so instantly mounted into her faded cheek reminded me of Ada's sudden blushes; and I caught myself wondering if *my* wife would have any such occasion to redden

with shame when she had reached the same age, and shuddered whilst I thought so ; and hated myself the next moment for daring to shudder or to think.

"Doubtless ; my name has been common enough in the mouths of men ; you know my history, Mr Estcourt ; there is no need for me to recapitulate it. At the time I left Colonel Rivers I thought that I had one excuse ; that of a home which he had made wretched by his infidelity and unkindness ; but now when I think of my daughter without a mother's care passing through the same temptations to which I was subjected, I know that I had none ; and that whatever my trials, I should have retained the charge which Heaven had given me in her. But it is too late to speak of that now ; it can never serve Ada either as counsel or warning. But you, who will have her happiness completely in your power, to make or mar as you will, see that you are as faithful to her as you require she shall be to you. The first thing which tempted me to go astray was my husband taunting me with the fact that, so long as he abstained from assaulting me, he might do as he chose, and I could obtain no redress. It set me thinking whether I might not take the law into my own hands, and prove to him and the world that I thought as little of his honour as he did of mine. Revenge was the impulse which prompted me to take the step that made me what I am ; and upon how many women has it not acted in like manner ! Revenge is a stronger feeling than love, Mr Estcourt."

"Perhaps so," I answered ; "fortunately I have as yet had no experience of it."

"Nor ever will have, I trust. Do not run away with the idea that I wish to excuse myself. I am past all that. Only remember my words if ever you should feel inclined to throw such a truth in my daughter's face. The law is hard upon us women ; we feel our impotency ; we know we cannot rid us of our shackles ; and so we burst them violently, and defy the world with the broken links still clinging to our wrists and ankles. We bruise ourselves, 'tis true, and bitterly ; but we bruise you into the bargain ; and half of it might be prevented if, knowing us to be but women, you did not treat us like men."

"It is an old grievance, Mrs Rivers," I replied, rising to take my leave, "and one which no words will mend. I feel

deeply for the situation in which you are placed, and would do anything that I could to alleviate it, if, as you say, it admitted of any remedy ; but I fear that with the expression of my sympathy all my power ends."

"Not so !" she exclaimed ; "you have promised to love my child, and to guard her with all your might from a fate such as mine, and not to reveal to her by word or look that you are conscious even of my existence—is it not the case ? I would sooner die than she should learn that I am living near her and yet unfit to speak to my own daughter ; if the least hint reached her of the fact, I should go far away, where I should have never the chance of meeting her again, and then the little pleasure left me would be destroyed. You will not take it from me, Mr Estcourt ? "

"Certainly not," I replied, decisively ; "Ada shall never hear one word from me of this evening's interview : I should consider such a step most injudicious. The knowledge of your vicinity could only have the effect of greatly upsetting her ; it could never make any difference in lowering the barrier between you."

This I said rather sternly, remembering the position in which I stood to the daughter ; almost too much so, perhaps, considering that the woman who stood by me was her mother ; but I spoke under the influence of very strong feelings, and I felt that it could not be otherwise. Mrs Rivers, however, did not appear to notice anything harsh in my manner ; on the contrary, she again thanked me for the promise I had given.

"May I ask you to come and see me again before you are married ? " she said wistfully, as I held her hand at parting.

"I will certainly come if you wish it," I replied.

"Oh, that is very good of you !" she exclaimed, her dark eyes lighting up with a remnant of their old fire. "You will come and bring me word how she is, and tell me of your plans, and where you are likely to settle. You will not forget it—stay ! here is a reminder for you. No ; be quiet, it is only a trifle to recall me and your promise sometimes to your mind ;" and as she spoke, she slipped a ring off one of her own fingers on to mine. I hesitated to accept the gift ; in fact I wished to return it. I represented to her that I should have no need of anything to remind me to keep my word, and I should be

greatly obliged if she would allow me to replace the ring on her finger. But she would take no denial. She insisted on my retaining the ornament; told me that if I did not wish to keep it I could throw it into the first gutter that I crossed, or present it to the first beggar I met, but she was determined not to receive it again: therefore I had no alternative but to thank her for her kindness. When I left her she accompanied me to the hall door, and opened it herself, and I was already half-way down the steps which led to the street when she said softly—

“Mr Estcourt, do not think worse of me than you can help; above all, never cast my conduct in Ada’s teeth, nor attribute my child’s shortcomings to my evil influence. We are all fallible; but I never harmed her, so help me, Heaven, except my prayers have done it.”

I was compelled to return and assure her that her misfortunes were greater in my eyes than her faults. Much as I had tried to steel my heart against this woman, there was a fascination in her manner, and an earnestness in her voice, which enlisted my sympathy against the conviction of my better judgment; and as I finally quitted her side, and, looking back, saw her standing in the doorway and gazing after me into the night with her large, sad, dark eyes, I felt so tempted to retrace my steps, and strive to speak some comfort to her, that it was by positive constraint I took my way to Brook Street without further parley. Arrived there, I sought my room at once; but I found it impossible to sleep. The chance which had brought me face to face with Ada Penryhn’s mother was too strange to be passed over as an ordinary occurrence; it had left my brain excited and confused, and, instead of retiring to bed, I sat up to think. It is true that I had often heard of Mrs Rivers, often spoken of her, and that I believed she was living; but it had never occurred to me that I might meet her in my walks through London. Her transgression and her shame were things of a date gone by; the remembrance of them almost had died from the minds of men; I had never realised that she must be still a woman under middle age, and might be living in the very midst of us, frequenting the same places of public amusement, and liable to be encountered during every stroll.

I could hardly realise it yet: it almost required the ring

flashing on my fourth finger to enable me to do so, and with a view to that end I now examined it. It was thoroughly a woman's toy, although one of no mean value, being in the shape of a horse-shoe and set with brilliants, which flashed and scintillated as I turned them about beneath the light.

With a sigh I replaced it on my hand. Was I sorry that she still lived to put it there, and claim a promise for a future interview with herself? Did I regret that Ada's mother had not died in fact when she died from out society; or that I had been less curious and more steadfast in my refusal to accompany her home? At this lapse of time I can hardly say; but I remember that the sight of the sparkling diamonds seemed to offend me, and that, whilst I thought, I crossed my arms upon my breast and hid them from my view.

For I had greater reason to be dissatisfied with my visit to Mrs Rivers than the mere fact of the knowledge of her existence could make me. I had stood in her house in the position of a guest without a right to question her mode of life or action; but I had observed on all sides the appearance, if not of luxury, at least of such comfort as is unobtainable without a good income. Whence did Mrs Rivers derive hers? I knew from what my sisters and Ada had told me of Lord Edward Grieves' penurious and selfish habits, that it was very unlikely, if he allowed her anything, it would be more than was necessary for her actual requirements; yet I had found her residing in a good house, situated in a fashionable locality, waited on by men-servants, and surrounded, as far as I could see, by everything she could desire. By whom was it all provided? These thoughts puzzled and vexed me far into the night, not for myself, but for their object. That *my* wife should ever be brought in contact with the plaything, cast-off or otherwise, of Lord Edward Grieves, I had long before settled to be impossible. The incident of the past evening, therefore, I should have allowed to exert no influence upon her lot or mine, even had I not been bound down to keep it secret; but to have discovered her mother to be not only still living, but still under a cloud, was a great annoyance to me, and one which I could not easily shake off. I sat and pondered over it until the gray light appearing through the curtained window, warned me that morning was at hand. Then I hastily threw off my clothes, flung myself on the bed, and

notwithstanding the vexatious nature of my meditations, was soon wrapt in a profound slumber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A QUARREL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

WHEN I awoke upon the following day, the sun was streaming brightly into my bedroom, and a voice outside the door was demanding whether I would have breakfast or luncheon served to me.

"Eh! what?" I said, starting up in bed and rubbing my eyes. "Come in, Saunders."

The man entered, and repeated the question.

"If you please, sir, will you have breakfast or luncheon? it's close upon one o'clock."

"The deuce it is," I exclaimed, my engagement to lunch with Ada immediately recurring to me. "I must go to Kensington at once: here, bring me up a cup of coffee, Saunders, and order my cab to be round in half an hour;" and springing out of bed, I commenced to make a rapid toilet. I had slept so soundly that the details of my interview of the previous evening were somewhat dulled upon my memory; and working away at my head before the glass as if I desired to tear each individual hair from its roots, I felt glad there was no necessity for arranging my ideas upon the subject. All that I had to do in Ada's presence was to dismiss the thought of Mrs Rivers completely from my mind, a task which I foresaw to be the pleasanter of the two.

Had it been my duty to inform the daughter of my visit to her mother, I must have spent an hour in separating what I wished from what I did not wish to say, but to hold my tongue altogether (being of the masculine gender) was sufficiently easy to me.

True to time, I jumped into my cab, and arrived punctually at Kensington, with no worse result than having thrown my horse into a good lather. Ada was waiting to receive me,

beaming as when we parted, and looking, if possible, still more charming. The tempting lunch was ready laid in the cool darkened room, which was filled with the mingled fragrance of the stocks and mignonette outside the window and the lobster-salad within, and the inevitable baby was far away, practising rural sports under the care of his nurse in Kensington Gardens.

Everything combined to promise an hour of enjoyment ; and after we had been at table a short time I was obliged to apologise to my hostess for the sharpness of my appetite.

"The fact is," I said, little dreaming to what my explanation would lead, "I have not had any breakfast to-day."

"Not had any breakfast !" exclaimed Ada, who had finished hers by nine o'clock ; "why, when did you get up, Gerald ?"

"Not very long ago," I answered, looking guilty. "I 'overlaid' myself (as the servants say) this morning."

"Did you go anywhere after you left me last night ?"

The question was put, as it was intended, most innocently, but it covered me with confusion. I could not give a straightforward answer without being prepared to follow it with another ; nor could I use actual deception upon the matter.

So I replied, but not quite stoutly—

"I walked home, you know, Ada, and I did not go to bed for some time after I reached there. I sat up thinking."

She smiled and blushed at that, and took my excuse as a compliment to herself. Following the train of thought I had raised, I said—

"We must announce the resolution we came to last night to our friends as soon as possible, Ada ; a month is no time for all the preparations needed for a fashionable wedding, is it ? though the quieter it is the better it will please me."

"And myself also," she replied ; "but I suppose your sisters will think otherwise. I will tell the news to my family, Gerald, if you will undertake to do it to yours."

"With the greatest pleasure," I said, laughing. "I am going over to Beatrice this evening, and will put up the banns for the first time of asking."

She was standing by the window, concealed by the boxes of flowers from the observation of passers-by ; as I spoke I went and stood by her, and took her two hands in mine.

"I do not think there is any 'just cause or impediment' between us, Ada," I remarked. "No one will rise up and forbid the banns."

"No one dares," she said, in a tone of soft contentment as she played with my fingers; and then she added in the same calm voice, "Gerald, where did you get that ring?"

I glanced hurriedly at the finger she indicated; the diamond ring with which Mrs Rivers had presented me still sparkled there. People may talk of the earth opening at their feet, or the sky falling, or any such improbable catastrophe, but they can never describe by a metaphor the suffocating feeling which overwhelms a man when he is unexpectedly convicted of a deed the consequences of which may be fatal to him, and knows he has nothing to say for himself. Such a feeling possessed me now, as Ada's ordinary question reached my ear, and I perceived, to my horror, that I had never removed the diamond horse-shoe from my finger, as I fully intended to have done before meeting her again. I had sat up so late the previous night, and had dressed with so much rapidity on rising, that the fact of its being there had perfectly escaped my memory, and unfortunately, it was too remarkable looking to escape another's notice. Had I been an adept at deception I might easily have said that it was a new purchase, an old possession, or the gift of one of my relations; but with all my faults I was not good at lying, and my hesitation in answering her question raised a suspicion in Ada's breast which otherwise she might never have entertained. She glanced rapidly from the ring to my face, and doubtless read my discomfiture plainly enough depicted there.

"Did you buy it?" she said, sharply; "it's a woman's ring, not a man's. Why, there are initials engraved inside it. It is not a new ornament."

She had slipped the jewel off my hand by this time, and held it up to the light. She was correct; the letters A. E. were engraved upon the reverse side of the gold.

"Who is A. E.?" she again demanded. "What do the letters stand for?"

"I do not know," I replied candidly. "I was not aware they were there."

"Not aware they were there," she repeated, in a tone of

incredulity ; "perhaps you did not know the ring was there either, Gerald ?"

"I really did not, Ada ; I placed it on my finger for a few hours, but I fully intended to take it off again before I came here."

"But why should you not wear that ring in my presence ? Who gave it to you ?"

"I have not said that any one gave it me, Ada."

"Did you buy it then ?"

"Why are you so curious on the subject ?"

"Gerald, that is no answer. Did you buy this ring, or did a woman give it to you ?"

"You are determined that if any one gave it, it must have been a woman."

"Of course ; it is a woman's ring. Can you deny that it was a gift ?"

"I cannot see that it is a matter which need affect you either way, Ada," I said ; but I began to feel rather uncomfortable about the business. "If you think the ring a pretty one, keep it for yourself. I set no value on it."

But the look of scorn with which I was greeted warned me that I had better not have made such a proposition. The little horse-shoe ring flew out of Ada's hands as if it had been a viper, and had the power to sting her, and as it clattered amongst the luncheon dishes, she said proudly—

"Thank you, I don't care to receive your cast-off gifts ; perhaps mine will some day share the same fate. Gerald, I know that that ring is a new acquisition ; you have never worn it before, and if you wished me to know that you possessed it, why did you change colour and hesitate when I first observed it on your finger ?"

"Pooh ! *change colour and hesitate*," I answered testily ; "you women are always finding a molehill about something or other, and magnifying it into a mountain. You allow your imagination to run away with you in every direction, and then you blame us for the absurd fancies provoked by your own jealousy. I thought better of you, Ada. I had placed you above the standard of ordinary schoolroom misses."

My taunt annoyed her, for the colour mounted into her face, but she turned towards me only the more determined. She was not a woman who ever parted with her vantage-ground

by losing her temper, but she resolved quickly, and she kept to her resolutions. Her jealousy was great, so was her pride, and especially on the subject of other women ; but she trusted for victory entirely to her powers of persuasion or argument. She never stamped her feet in impotent rage, or blurred her face with tears that, in lieu of strengthening, weakened her cause. When she faced me on the present occasion, I saw that she was angry, because the soft look in her eyes had given place to a steady fire, and her nostrils were slightly distended, but to all other appearance she was perfectly calm.

"If I am wrong, Gerald, you cannot refuse, in consideration of my weakness, and the position in which we stand to one another, to answer me a few questions on this subject."

"What do you wish to ask me?"

"First—was that ring given to you?"

"Well, if you *will* have it, Ada, it was ; but I warn you that you will gain nothing by persisting in catechising me upon this point. You will have to rest satisfied with very little information about it, for I have very little to give. I never wanted the ring, and I was a great fool not to throw it in the gutter, as I was advised to do."

"Who advised you?"

I was regularly "in" for it now, and I did not consider my next answer would damage my cause.

"The person who gave it me."

"Why did she do so, Gerald?"

"God knows," I said impatiently. How I wished at that moment that the ring, and its giver, and everything connected with her, were at the bottom of the Red Sea.

"Oh ! then it *was* a present from a woman," readily inferred my betrothed. "When did she give it you, Gerald?"

"I shall not tell you." These words were the harshest I had ever used to Ada ; for a moment I almost thought she shuddered under them ; but with the next she appeared more resolute than ever.

"Nor who she was?"

"No !"

"Will you affirm that she was a lady?"

"I will affirm nothing. I consider you have no right to put these questions to me."

"At least, tell me that she was respectable."

I was silent. In the interval of our great emotions I could hear Ada's quick breathing, and the beating of my own heart; and when she again spoke I thought her voice was altered. She swallowed once or twice as if her throat was dry; and then she said rather slowly—

"Gerald! say it was not last night: I will be quite satisfied if you will only say it was not last night!"

Still I answered nothing; I had nothing to answer. Her next words came almost in a voice of entreaty—

"Not when you had just parted with me, Gerald! when I had just promised to become your wife!"

"If you think I have broken our condition, Ada, you are mistaken," I said, taking heart to address her. A gleam of pleasure lighted up her countenance.

"Then you did not receive this ring yesterday," she exclaimed, almost confidently. But my resumed silence scared the hope away as soon as it had arisen. Yet she seemed to grasp at any chance, however unreasonable, and said rapidly, "It was one of your sisters gave it you, Gerald, was it not? and you are concealing the fact, just to frighten me! Ah! what a fool I am to be so easily alarmed. You take advantage of my weakness. Or did you buy it second-hand," (forgetting my avowal that it was a present.) "I believe that is it, after all; and you meant to give it to me, and are ashamed to own that it did not come from Howell and James. If it is only that, you know how pleased I should be to wear it, initials and all. *A. E.*" she continued, and then, with a sudden thought, she blushed rosy red. "You have not anticipated my name, Gerald, have you?"

She looked me full in the face as she spoke; and I would have given worlds to be able naturally to seize the happy idea which she had started, and declare that *A. E.* stood for the name which should be hers; but I could not. The transient hope faded from her eyes as they met mine; the old softness, which the notion had revived was replaced by a look of indignation; and she exclaimed contemptuously—

"You have not broken our condition, Gerald? and yet you cannot deny that this bauble was given you yesterday by a woman for whose character you will not vouch. What do you expect me to think of you? what do you expect me to do? Can you suppose that under such circumstances I shall

consider myself bound to hold to the promise I gave you last night? that I will consent to become your wife whilst you have secret transactions with other women, of which you cannot, or will not, give me the least account? Do you even think that I will remain engaged to you when you break, without scruple, the only condition upon which I agreed to become so? No; it is impossible! I have forgiven you once, but I cannot do so again; no woman would stand this from any man, unless she was actually in his power, and I will not stand it from you."

Her eyes and cheeks were flaming; and she turned away from me as though the business was settled there and then. I perceived that she was terribly agitated, and I felt I was in a predicament, from which, as yet, I foresaw no escape. How bitterly I regretted that I had been sufficiently rash to give so binding and complete a promise of secrecy to Mrs Rivers, that I was altogether prevented from exculpating myself from the charge laid against me, except by a flat denial of any dereliction from duty, which, whilst I could not refute the minor accusations, was of no avail. Feeling that, under these circumstances, to say anything more upon the topic immediately under discussion was to make a bad matter worse, I took another stand, and attempted, not to defend the imputation, but the idea that it was indefensible.

"You have condemned me without evidence," I said in a tone almost as haughty and offended as her own, "and unfortunately I am not in a position, owing to a promise of confidence, to clear myself from your unjust accusations. But supposing the worst, Ada, is it possible that you would cast me off entirely for one false step?"

"Not one," she answered, quickly. "Remember the dinner at Richmond."

"I have not forgotten it," I said, sarcastically; "it was a weighty sin, I allow; almost as bad as that of which your fancy now accuses me; but you are as unreasonable as the generality of your sex. You can make no distinction between *l'infidélité du corps* and *l'infidélité du cœur*; and if the man who has sworn allegiance to you breaks but one letter of the law, he is guilty of all. You showed your love of tyranny at the outset by exacting so absurd a promise from me; and my fault lay in being so foolish as to subscribe my name to such

for the sake of any woman. Had I acted as I should have done, and told you plainly that if you would not have a husband capable of judging for himself, you might have none at all, things would have turned out very differently."

"That is right," she returned, fiercely; "you have injured me by the act, insult me by the inference. I took you for what you are, Gerald, a man with his heart wrapt up in the world; and I knew that if your affection for myself was not strong enough to wean you from it as a lover, it would never do so as a husband. The sequel has proved whether my fears were ill-founded. You choose to go your own way; to associate with your own friends; to act in direct opposition to my wishes; and then stoop to deception to hide your doings from me."

Here I looked at her inquiringly.

"What did you say," she continued, answering my look, "when I asked you if you went anywhere last night after leaving me?"

"I did not deceive you, Ada; I only said"—

"Oh! don't speak to me," she went on, in a tone of contempt; "if you did not tell a direct falsehood, you did so by implication; and you know it. Had it not been for the unintentional presence of that ring, I should never have heard anything upon the subject."

She was right: and I bit my lip, and looked out of the window.

"Gerald! I would bear this behaviour from no man; I retract my promise to be your wife. You are free from this hour to go where you list and associate with whom you will!"

Notwithstanding what had gone before, this summary dismissal startled me; but I saw that, whether under the influence of passion or not, Ada Penryhn was determined, and my own blood rose in consequence.

"I accept your offer," I replied, "and thank you for my release; you exercise your authority so briskly as a mistress, that I should have had sundry fears for your subjection as a wife."

"No more than myself for your fidelity as a husband, or forbearance as a ruler. If you can speak to me in this manner when you possess no right to do so, what might I not have expected had I been simple enough to vow submission to you? A bad servant seldom makes a good master."

"You are pleased to be complimentary, Mrs Penryhn, but there is a reverse to your maxim ; a bad master would hardly make a good servant."

"*Il y a des reproches qui louent et des louanges qui médisent,*" she replied, "and I never wish to hear either the one or the other from you again"

"I have no intention of giving you the opportunity," I said angrily as I approached the door. "I am leaving you to the freedom which you covet."

"It is all that I desire," she answered in the same tone and without even turning her head to look at me.

Yet in the midst of my passion, my heart-strings were stretched to their uttermost, and I could not go without a final effort to come to an explanation with her.

"Ada, you know that you are wrong ! you know that you will regret the step you are taking ! If I leave this house as I am now, it will be, never to return !"

A slight shiver passed over her frame, but her eyes met mine, resolute as before.

"Will you then give me a full explanation of the means by which you became possessed of that ring ?"

"I cannot," I commenced——

"Then I cannot," she exclaimed, raising her voice, "and I will not ; you shall find that there is at least one woman in the world who can keep to what she has said ; who requires 'an eye for an eye,' and 'a tooth for a tooth.'"

Her words were bitter, but I heard no more, for I rushed from the room, slamming the door after me, and found my way into the street, blindly. I had dismissed my own cab, but I hailed the first that passed, and ordered the driver to take me to Brook Street. My most prominent feelings were those of rage and indignation at what appeared to me so unjust a dismissal ; and if, even at that early stage of my loneliness, an under-current of sickly despair for so complete a shattering of my hopes made itself known, my passion got the better of it and trampled it down. Arrived at home, I left the cab, and walking as one in a dream, entered the house which thenceforth would be a place of desolation for me. It seemed too soon to make any plans, yet my head and my heart were burning, and I felt that of all things inaction would be the least bearable. I could not stay in London ; of that

I was determined, neither could I go to Grasslands, nor yet to any of my friends. Of the Continent I was tired; besides it was there we had intended going when—when that happened which now would never be. Stopping to consider the date of the month put a new idea into my mind. It was the second; on the fourth the steamer sailed from Southampton for Madras. I had often wished to travel in the East, now was my opportunity; I would go to Alexandria and Cairo, wander through Arabia, if I felt so inclined, or penetrate to India itself—what was there to prevent me? No home ties, that was very evident, nor fear of injuring my health or myself, for somebody's sake—all such puerile reasons were over for me; I had done with them for the first time and the last. There was nothing dilatory about my character; from a boy I had always been as quick to do as to resolve; and my mind once made up, I rang the bell and greatly astonished Saunders by directing him to pack up a portmanteau at once, containing such articles as I should need for a few months' sojourn in the East. He was too well trained a servant to express any surprise at the unexpected orders, but he asked for my directions twice over; and then, in a discreet manner, whether I wished him to accompany me. I replied in the negative: I knew I was flying from England that I might recover the shock I had received without witnesses, and I had no intention of admitting so able a one as my body servant to my confidence.

"When shall you start, sir?" was the next question which he ventured to put to me.

"I shall run down to Southampton to-morrow morning, and I shall take you with me as far as that, in order to see to my luggage. Don't burthen me with more than a couple of portmanteaux, and put up nothing but the lightest clothes. I am going now to Lady Lyndon's; if any one calls, say I shall not be home to-night."

I knew that I could not leave England without letting some of my relations know of my ruptured engagement and sudden flight. It was not a palatable task for me; but strange to say, when I thought the matter over, I felt I could break the news more easily to Gertrude than to either of my other sisters. Beatrice would have wanted to hear too many details, and Emeline would have broken my heart and her own over the

story; but Gertrude would treat the whole affair in a prosaic, business-like style, which if it said little for her sympathy, was more in accordance with my need. So, waiting until I knew their dinner must be concluded, I gathered up all my courage, and presenting myself at the Lyndons' house, requested to speak to my sister alone. I was shown into a breakfast-room, where in a few minutes, radiant in silks and jewels, she joined me. She looked so bright and sparkling and pretty as she entered the apartment, that I could not help drawing an involuntary comparison between her and myself, and remembering, with sharp pain, that at that hour, only the day before, some one else looked as pretty and I had felt as bright—and now——

"What is it you want, Gerald?" exclaimed Gertrude, in the coquettish manner which she never dropped, even with her brother, "and why didn't you go into the dining-room? Horace has not left it yet, and his father is here to-night."

"No, thank you, Gerty, I only came to say a few words to yourself. I have some news to tell you. I am going to travel in the East for a few months, and I start the day after to-morrow."

She opened her blue eyes very wide and laughed, but did not show any other signs of astonishment.

"Rather a sudden determination, isn't it, Gerald?"

"Very much so; indeed I only made up my mind two hours ago. The fact is, Gertrude, my engagement with Miss Penryhn is broken off."

My sister started, but the expression which flitted over her face on the reception of my intelligence was not one of displeasure. On the contrary, she almost looked relieved.

"Indeed! Well, to tell truth, Gerald, I am not very much surprised. Somehow, I have never thought it would come to a marriage. How did it happen?"

"It signifies little *how* it happened," I answered, quickly, "the thing is done, and irrevocably. All I want of you is to let Beatrice and the rest know of it, for I shall not have time to tell them myself before I start."

"Oh, of course I will; you may depend on me. And so it is *really off*, Gerald; once and for all. I hope you won't be offended with me, but upon my word I can't help being rather glad to hear it. You might have done so much better, you know—and, after all, *who is Mrs Penryhn?* I allow she is

good-looking ; but her family is of no consequence ; and with that disgraceful stigma attached to her mother, I think there are very few men in your position who would have engaged themselves to her."

"It is of no use discussing that now," I said, my blood boiling at the aspersions cast upon Ada's name.

"No, you are right, but I can't help saying it ; a *widow* too, and with an encumbrance into the bargain. Oh, Jerry ! I was *so vexed* when I heard of it that I could have torn my hair ; I am so pleased it has all ended in nothing. I think you ought to be very grateful for the escape you have had."

"I have had no escape," I answered roughly ; "I made my choice freely, and I have unmade it freely. The reason for the dissolution of my engagement is purely distinct from any of the reasons which first made me propose to Mrs Penryhn, but it concerns her and myself alone ; that it is dissolved is all the intelligence you need circulate. Good-night and good-bye. I must go now, for I have several things to do."

I rose as I spoke, and took my sister's hand ; but she tried to detain me.

"Oh, don't go yet, Gerald ! Come in and see Horace and your uncle for a few minutes. Come in at least and say good-bye to them ;" but I again refused.

"No ! don't ask me, Gerty—I am hurried, and I am not—quite well. Let me go home ; you can tell them all that is needful. God bless you, my dear !" and I took her in my arms and kissed her. She followed me into the hall, and again stopped me.

"Shall you not see Beatrice, Jerry ?"

"No ! I told you so before."

"Nor Emmeline ?"

"I shall write to Emmeline from Southampton."

Then I felt her light detaining touch upon my shoulder, and she said, dubiously, but as if she had just roused to a semi-consciousness of the truth—

"Are you unhappy about this affair, Gerald ?"

But Gertrude was not the woman I could unburthen my heart to : had she been, I should not have selected her as the recipient of my news. I laughed harshly as I answered—

"Unhappy—my dear child—what are you talking about ? do I look as if I was unhappy ?"

"I thought just now"—she began.

"You thought just wrong," I interposed. "Mrs Penryhn and I are not children remember ; we know perfectly well what we are about, and we have adopted the measures we consider best calculated to increase our happiness, not decrease it."

"Ah ! that is all right then," replied my easily-satisfied sister. "I am very glad of that, Gerald dear ; good-bye," and the next moment I had passed into the night alone.

I did not take a cab this time, but bent my steps homewards on foot. It was a dark night for the season of year ; the cloudy sky seemed as though it were full of rain, and the stars had not yet appeared. As I walked rapidly along my sister's careless question recurred to my mind, "Are you unhappy about this affair ?" At the same moment my eye fell upon the diamond horse-shoe still glittering upon my hand, and with an oath, for which I trust I was forgiven, I seized the wretched bauble off my finger, and hurled it far away into the garden of a square through which I was passing.

I could not see it, but I knew that it must have fallen there ; and even in the midst of my bitter pain, I could not help wondering who would find it next, and when—whether it would be picked up, a rich treasure by some wondering child or nurse-maid on the following day, or whether the coming shower would drive it beneath the mould, never to be found perhaps until it was dug up a few centuries hence—and hoarded as a curiosity.

I could think of the trumpery ring, and speculate on the probabilities of its resurrection ; but I bestowed no surmises on the likelihood of happiness ever returning to Ada's heart or mine. For that I was too angry, too proud, and believed myself to be too much injured.

CHAPTER XXX.

ADrift !

It was morning before I reached the house in Brook Street : Saunders was sitting up for me, although I had given him no orders to do so. This man was not a new servant ; he had lived with my father for several years, and had entered my service on my return from abroad. He sometimes, therefore, took the privilege of a long acquaintance to look after me when I did not look after myself. As I recrossed the threshold I put but two questions to him—"Has any one been here?" and "Are my things ready?" to both of which he answered in the affirmative. The portmanteaux were packed and standing in the hall ; and Mr Thomas Logan had inquired for me soon after I left the house on the previous evening ; but Saunders had given him my message, with the further information that I was about to start on the following day from Southampton for Alexandria. For a moment this intelligence disconcerted me, but not longer ; before the night every one would have heard not only of my departure, but its cause ; what could it signify if the man who I felt would rejoice most at my defeat came to the knowledge of it a few hours earlier ? But the idea, added to what I was then suffering, cast, I suppose, a sickly expression over my countenance, for as I entered the dining-room, and Saunders turned up the gas to aid the dim uncertain light which was struggling through the shuttered windows, and the full glare fell on my face, he started and stepped backwards.

"Are you ill, sir?" he demanded, surprised out of his usual caution.

"What the devil do you mean?" I exclaimed angrily, scouting sympathy in my pain, and annoyed that my appearance should provoke it ; "mind your own business, and fetch me some brandy and water, and then I will give you such directions as I wish left with the other servants."

He obeyed me, and I drank off a full tumbler of the mixture, which I had better have left alone, as I had already taken

more than was good for me ; but I felt hot and feverish, and had greater thirst than discretion, whilst the brandy gave me a strength which, though fictitious, was sorely needed for what I had to do. I then told Saunders that the period of my return home was quite uncertain, but I had no intention of extending my stay in the East beyond a few months ; meanwhile, I looked to him to see that everything in the household was conducted properly. My directions concluded, I expected the man to quit the room, but he still lingered, unwilling, I fancy, to leave myself and the brandy bottle in such close juxtaposition.

“ That is all,” I remarked briefly, observing his hesitation.

“ Yes, sir, thank you ; and you start, sir ? ” ——

“ By the ten o'clock train, if there is such a one. Look up the time-table, Saunders, and see.”

“ Very good, sir. Your bedroom is ready for you, sir.”

“ All right ; you can go now.”

“ Yes, sir. Shall I light your bedroom candle, sir ? ”

Here I disgraced myself by swearing at his importunity, but his attentions and ill-concealed desire to see me safely into bed not only worried but incensed me. Rid of him at last, I applied myself afresh to my false strength, and believed, under its influence, that I was capable of facing the worst that fate could bring upon me. As I have observed before, rage and indignation were the prevailing feelings of my mind : it was too soon for me to lament the untoward circumstances which had combined to ruin my hopes ; I could only think of Ada's cruel words, and whilst I thought, condemn her injustice, scorn the weakness of her love, and smile with pitying contempt upon her inability to trust. What had I not done for this woman ? What would I not have done in order to prove the strength of my own affection ?

At her desire, I had promised to give up all the dissipations common to my age and sex ; ay ! not only promised, but (notwithstanding the dinner at Richmond) kept my word honourably. In order to satisfy a woman's puerile jealousy, I had become the wonder and laughing-stock of all the men of my acquaintance ; but I had kept to my condition bravely, nevertheless, and had asked nothing, but her love and belief, in return. I had made her wish my law, her fancy my religion, but she had requited my devotion by casting me off on the

first opportunity she had found for doing so ; and when I considered the event which had given that opportunity birth, I became still more exasperated. To aid the feelings under which I laboured, I recalled every circumstance which could derogate in my mind from the worth of Ada Penryhn as a wife. I thought of the indifference she had displayed towards me at Freshwawe ; of her present regard being but secondhand at the best ; of her child, and the aversion to his existence which I had never quite conquered ; and lastly, of her outcast mother living mysteriously in the house at the back of Park Lane : and at this juncture, I (or at least that semblance of myself which had risen at the invocation of the brandy) recklessly laughed aloud, and dared to surmise, for the furtherance of my content, that as the mother was, so the daughter might be, and I was a lucky man to be so easily quit of my bargain. In the same spirit, at the time appointed, I travelled down to Southampton, Saunders having found a train which tallied with my wishes. Arrived at this place, to which I was a perfect stranger, I found that the steamer did not start until one o'clock the next afternoon, and that I had a long day and night to pass through before I could bid farewell to the soil which now seemed to burn beneath my feet. But I was out of London ; that was one comfort ; and I seemed to breathe more freely at Southampton. As soon as my servant had engaged rooms for me at the hotel, and made all arrangements relative to my passage to Alexandria, I sent him back to town. His presence irritated me ; I fancied I read inquiry in each look he directed towards me, compassion in every word he uttered. When he was gone I left the hotel and wandered out into the town alone. They say that suicides hurrying on with deliberate intention to their death can yet, in the contemplation of the most trivial circumstances which surround them, lose momentary consciousness of the awful fate that awaits them. Just so I remember putting away my trouble as it were by main force, whilst I compelled myself to note the things which I encountered during that solitary walk.

I sauntered down the High Street, observing how second-rate were the shops with which it was lined, and the people who stared into their windows ; how very dirty the alleys which intersected it ; and how many fishmongers it contained. I even stopped at one of the latter, and asking the price of some

fine red prawns displayed upon his slab, decided that they were to be purchased cheaper in London than in Southampton.

I stood for more than ten minutes opposite a wonderful clock in the front of a town hall, or a church, or some other public building, and which, on striking the hour, played a tune, whilst little figures moved about and struck the air in a vague way with hammers. I think I understood all about it at the time, but my mind was too confused to remember it distinctly afterwards. I know that the sun was very hot and glaring, and that its heat warned me, what with my fatigue and want of sleep, to seek some shelter from it; still I went on, caring nothing whither, so that I kept moving and had no time for thought. At the entrance of one of the alleys before alluded to, a waving black flag excited my curiosity, and I walked down to see if I could discover the reason. One or two dirty faces peered at me from the doors and windows; and I fancied they expressed surprise, but still I picked my way over the rounded stones and the filthy gutters, which the drains from all the houses would not permit, even in the height of summer, to be dry. Presently a woman followed and accosted me.

"Please, sir," she commenced.

I thought she asked alms, and roughly told her to go about her business.

"Please, sir, you shouldn't come down here; didn't you see the black flag a-flying? but maybe you're a stranger in these parts."

"What does the flag mean?" I asked, carelessly.

"Bless you, sir, it's the small-pox; it's all over the place just now, and we have it fearful down this street. Get ye out of it, sir, for the love of God!"

I threw the woman some money in return for her information, but I moved none the faster for its reception. What was the small-pox to me, or any danger? If it despatched me, so much the better. I believe I even lingered about the infected spot, fancying what they would all think in London if I took it and died like a dog down in that hole alone. When at last, fairly beaten by my fatigue, I returned to the hotel, I was told that two gentlemen were waiting to see me. This was what I had dreaded: this was what had driven me to walk about until I nearly dropped: the fear of some of my

friends following me with the intention of dissuading me from my purpose. I went up to my room determined to resist all such interference; and entered it heated with liquor, and in a spirit of opposition which the sight of the cheery and well-known faces of George and Jack Lascelles had no power to mitigate.

"Why are you come?" I said, almost rudely, as I encountered them.

"To look after you, old boy, of course," replied George, whilst Jack took my hand and pressed it; "Gertrude told us of your sudden determination to leave England, but we could hardly believe it until we called in Brook Street and found it was correct. Come, Jerry, you'll give up this trip to Egypt, won't you, or, at all events, defer it until next month; it has been too hastily arranged to turn out well, and it will be best postponed if only to save the affairs of yourself and another person from becoming public scandal. We are awfully sorry for you, old fellow."

But I was in no fit state to receive their sympathy—in no mood to accept it.

"And what the deuce is the good of your being sorry?" I exclaimed, "it's more than I am for myself. As for persuading me not to go to Alexandria, you've wasted your time, and altogether mistaken your man. I do not know what you mean by public scandal, having done nothing to incur it, but if I had, it would make no difference in my plans. My passage is taken to Egypt, and I start to-morrow."

"But why such hurry," argued my cousin, "if your feelings are not concerned in the matter. I was going to suggest that with a little patience, things might be set right again between yourself and Ada Penryhn, but"—

"Be kind enough to keep your suggestions to yourself, George; I do not need them."

"I made it with the best intentions," he answered, carelessly.

"D—n your best intentions," I replied. The mention of her name, and from the lips of another man, had almost maddened me.

"Now, Jerry," said Jack, coaxingly, "you'll come back with us to town to-night, and we'll all go to Scotland and have a month's grouse-shooting, and then you shall go where you please."

But the proposal, however kindly meant, by recalling a certain engagement which I had made for the same purpose with Colonel Rivers, only nettled instead of soothing me.

"Am I not my own master," I exclaimed, "that I am to submit to be told that I shall go here and go there without the least reference to my inclinations? I have declared to you already my intention to leave England; that is sufficient."

Here George, who was doubtless hurt by the manner in which I had addressed them both, turned on his heel and was about to leave the room.

"Come, Jack," he said, abruptly, "since Estcourt considers our presence unwelcome, I think we had better go."

"Oh, nonsense, George," replied my younger cousin, "don't take offence at nothing. Jerry is a little out of sorts, aren't you, old chum? You know better than to be angry with such old friends as we are because we want to advise you for the best."

"If you are really my friends," I said, wildly, "you will leave me to myself, and not torment me with any more persuasions to alter my mind, or questions as to the reason of my resolve. My engagement is broken off, and it is my purpose to leave England; that is all that is necessary for you to know upon the subject."

"But may we not speak to you?" he inquired, in a tone of reproach.

"No, I am not in a fit state to speak to any one; I would rather be alone. I should quarrel with my own father were he to come back to me to-day."

"And has it really cut you up like this, Jerry?" said Jack, with sorrowful interest. "Why, no woman in the world is worth so much fretting about, let alone the daughter of a *divorcée*."

As the words of depreciation left his lips I sprung to my feet, and, in my senseless rage, had nearly struck him.

Thank God that I did not!

"How dare you mention her to me?" I exclaimed, white with passion; "you force yourself into my presence when I tell you I wish to be alone, and then you insult me into the bargain."

I glared at him for a moment quite mastered by my in-

firmity, and then I sunk into a chair and buried my face in my hands, but not before I had seen George Lascelles lay his hand upon his brother's arm as if to lead him away.

As for me, I was miserable. The eyes which had met mine were still the same frank eyes which from my childhood upwards had never failed to look at me with affection, and I could have cursed myself for having spoken to him as I did. But I never moved, and they left the room without answering me. I heard their feet descend the hotel stairs and sound upon the pavement outside, but not a word appeared to pass between them. When half an hour and more had elapsed, and I felt there was no chance of their returning, I sprung up from the position I had hitherto maintained and rung the bell violently.

"Bring me brandy and water," I said to the waiter who answered my appeal. The man stared at me as I spoke, and whilst he had gone to execute the order, I turned and surveyed myself in the looking-glass. No wonder that he stared. My face was ashen pale; nothing about me seemed alive except my eyes, and my hair was in the greatest disorder. I remembered then, and not before, that I had paid no attention to my toilet that day. It mattered little, however; I was alone, and likely now, thank heaven, to be left so. When the waiter returned with the brandy and water he brought me a note which had just arrived. he said, by a porter from the railway station. I knew the writing at once; it was that of Jack Lascelles, and the contents, scribbled in pencil, were brief and easily mastered.

"DEAR JERRY,

"I'm writing from the station. You must be aware I never intended to wound you by what I said, but Gerty told us that you had broken off your engagement yourself, and were rather thankful for the release. I shall not think twice of what you said to me. I know you didn't mean it. I should stay over the night and see you off, but I made so sure you would be open to persuasion that I procured no leave. Good-bye, old fellow. *Bon voyage.*

"Yours,
"J. L."

These were his words, or to this effect, for I experienced such pain in their reception that as soon as I had perused them I tore the paper across and cast the fragments out of my sight. There was no mention of his brother in the note, and I was not surprised at it. I could imagine George's haughty refusal to send me any message, and I knew that my conduct had deserved worse at his hands. I could not deceive myself ; I recalled their many former kindnesses to me ; their uniform forbearance ; and was compelled to have frequent recourse to my Dutch courage to prevent tears rising at the recollection of the interview which had just passed between us.

It was now evening : the intense heat of the day had subsided. The breeze which gently lifted the blind from the open window, albeit it blew from over a sea of mud, was refreshing ; and the waiter again appeared to ask when I would have my dinner. At first, with an expression of impatience at the demand, I refused to take any ; but noticing the man's renewed look of amazement, I remembered that I was in a hotel, and gave a random order for anything they had in the house, at any time, which, in the course of half an hour, produced a very creditable repast for one. I sat down to it as a matter of course ; but I had fasted too long and drunk too much to have any appetite, and the dishes were cleared away in much the same condition as they had been placed on the table, whilst I leaned my head upon my hand, and stared moodily at the scenes which were passing in the street below. Left to myself again, I remembered my promise to write to Emmeline from Southampton, and, procuring my desk, set myself to the task of fulfilment. But, with the paper before me and my pen in my hand, I did not know what to say to her. I would not throw the blame of our severed engagement upon Ada Penryhn, neither had I any excuse to offer for the share I had taken in its dissolution. I felt it was a subject impossible to write about ; Emmeline would be certain to hear of it from her sisters. She might place what construction she chose upon my conduct, for I saw no chance of my ever being able to give her a satisfactory explanation of it. Meanwhile, what could I tell her, except that I was wretched ? As I thought thus, the hotel was alive with sounds of mirth and business. The weather being so warm, every window and door was thrown wide open, and the various orders, demands, and in-

quiries issued by the passengers who had arrived by the last mail, and the passengers who were to start by the present one, were more easily overheard than executed. Here was an irascible old Anglo-Indian, just returned to his native country, who stalked about the landings and corridors in a helmet-shaped hat, made of white pith and adorned with numerous folds of muslin, and seemed to imagine that the hotel and all its waiters belonged to himself by the way in which he swore at them.

"D—n it, sir," I heard him splutter, as I sat alone in the fast-falling dusk, "if I have asked for *brandy pawnee* once, I have asked for it a dozen times. This is not the kind of treatment we put up with in Calcutta, sir. If a club waiter doesn't execute an order as soon as it is delivered, we dismiss him, sir. Here! hi!" (to a passing waiter) "*brandy pawnee lao—jaldi*. D—n it, the 'soors' don't seem to understand plain English."

Then I heard the ladies who were to start on the morrow making their arrangements for the night, and confiding their little difficulties to sympathetic chambermaids upon the landings, until they were scared back into their private apartments by the ascent of the staircase being made by some half-dozen young fellows full of merriment, by whom going out to India appeared to be regarded rather as a "lark" than otherwise. Indeed, all over the house there was more fun and noise apparent than mourning. Everybody seemed to have some friends going with him except myself: everybody at least had some friends to see him off or to keep up his spirits to the last. The room which I occupied was on the second floor, and a verandah in front of the window ran the length of the hotel. As I still sat over my writing-desk, although it was now too dark to do anything without candles, a couple emerged from the apartment next my own, and stood in the balcony together, looking down upon the street. I could not see their figures, but I knew from their voices that they were man and woman. He was the first to speak—

"You must take a good look at English ground, dear Amy, for it may be many years before you see it again."

"I know that," she said, and I fancied she was leaning on him as she spoke; "but, Hugh, *we go together*."

He did not answer her, and in the silence that succeeded I

pictured them pressed against each other's hearts, and too content for words. I could not bear it ; I had been suffering the greatest depression since my cousins had left me. Now my arms sunk down upon the desk before me, and I buried my face in their shelter.

What had I done that I should feel so desolate, so miserable, whilst others had company, friendship, and love wherewith to solace themselves ? These were all leaving their native land from sheer necessity, to follow a profession or procure a livelihood, and yet could smile, put a brave face upon the inevitable, and look forward cheerfully to the hope of return ; whilst I, who had fortune sufficient for my need, was flying from England, alone and wretched, in the attempt to stifle a feeling which I should have been too proud to entertain, regret for the loss of a woman who could disencumber herself of me as of cast-off raiment. And under the influence of such a feeling I had quarrelled with my best friends, men who were worth a dozen women in the strength and fidelity of their attachment. Why had I been such a fool as not to perceive it before ? I had offended them, and they had justly left me a prey to myself, and to that heaviness of spirits which is commonly known as the " horrors." They were on me now in full force, weighing me down to the very earth, so that, had I dared, I would have cut my throat to escape from them.

What I had expected I hardly know ; whether I had hoped that Ada might relent in time to prevent my departure, or that my cousins might return to bear me company, or to take me by force to London, it is impossible for me to say ; but I remember as I sat there, that dread despondency crept over me more and more, until I almost felt that I could kneel to any one who would promise to stay by me, and not to leave me alone with that terrible leaden weight dragging my soul down into an earthly hell.

Dimly as they are pictured forth, most people will understand my feelings, for there are few who, at some period or other of their lives, have not experienced the same, though perhaps in slighter measure. At last I could stand them no longer ; I believed that I was going mad ; I left my position with an oath, and applied myself afresh to the fatal brandy. A reaction set in : why should I play the woman when the

means of forgetfulness stood close to my elbow? I had never drunk, but that was no reason why I should not do so now. Hitherto I had had no need; but few would deny that, under present circumstances, the waters of Lethe were slightly desirable. Was there any law by which, when a man could obtain relief from suffering, he was bidden to dash the medicine from his lips? No!

À bas la mélancholie ! Vive l'eau de vie !

I was at the height of the fierce interval which followed this determination, when the waiter, coming in to light the gas, brought information that a lady requested to see me. I was by that time in no condition to speculate on the identity of my visitor. A confused notion of Emmeline flitted through my brain, but my principal idea was that the presence of any friend would be acceptable to me.

"Lady wants to see me!" I replied, with thickened utterance to the waiter's intelligence. "Show her up, of course—it's only my mother."

The man smiled incredulously as he received my explanation, but he left the room, and returning in a few seconds again, threw open the door, and admitted—Julia Sherman.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WRECKED.

ALTHOUGH my faculties were considerably dulled from the effects of my copious libations, they were not so obscured as to leave me in any doubt of who it was that stood before me. I recognised her at once, and notwithstanding my longing for companionship, with more surprise than pleasure.

"Julia," I exclaimed, "what brings you here? You are the last person on earth I should have thought of seeing."

The waiter had left us again by this time, yet she still lingered on the threshold, as if uncertain what reception I might accord her. She looked very pretty as she stood there, robed in some diaphanous material suitable to the season, with

a fragile erection of tulle and artificial flowers covering her flaxen hair, and her large blue eyes swimming in something very like tears.

"I have followed you," she said, timidly. "I heard that you were about to leave England, and I wished to say good-bye to you before you went."

"And from whom could you have heard it, Julia?"

"I called in Brook Street this morning, (don't be angry, Gerald; I call there sometimes, just to learn if you are well,) and the servants told me of your intention. But it is not true, is it?"

"What is not true?"

"That you are going to Egypt, and by yourself?"

"It can make no difference to you, Julia, either way. If I died to-morrow, you are provided for."

"How often am I to say that it is not the money, but yourself I care for," she replied. "You are going away from England, unhappy and alone, without a friend to comfort you or to nurse you should you fall ill; and then you say it can make no difference to me. You are cruel, Gerald."

She had advanced into the room by this time, and taken up a position by my side.

"No more it will," I answered fiercely. "You do not really love me, Julia—no one does. I am down on my luck just now; the friends I valued most have forsaken me, and I am prepared to meet the worst that fate can send."

"You never valued me," she said, demurely, "yet I am here. I would not desert you, Gerald, come what might. Let me go with you to Egypt. If I cannot comfort, I may be of use should anything happen to you in that dreadful country. Think what it would be in any emergency to find yourself quite alone, without a face near you to which you have been accustomed. Take me with you; I have been miserable since we parted; but I have not dared to tell you of it until I heard that you were so yourself."

She looked so pretty as she pleaded thus, and appeared so much in earnest, that, unable as I was to judge betwixt right and wrong, her words began to assume a subtle influence over my mind, and instead of answering her at once in the negative, I commenced to argue with my inclinations. The half-inebriated state to which I had reduced myself disturbed my

imagination, and left me totally unfit to reason. Everybody, at that moment, appeared to be in the wrong but Julia Sherman; everybody had misjudged and abandoned me except herself; she was the only creature in the world who clung to me, whom the world had abandoned; the only one who loved and trusted through evil report and good. In the fever and distress of my mind, virtue changed places with vice, sense with folly, duty with caprice, and, to turn the scale of my wavering heart, the demon of revenge took possession of it, and prompted me to evil. For whom had I cast off the woman before me? For whom had I broken off all intimacy with her, never giving her feelings in the matter a single thought; but for one who had cast me off in my turn, and for less occasion! Retribution had truly overtaken me now, yet should I refuse the slight consolation offered by the knowledge of a single heart's fidelity, for the sake of one who would not believe in virtue, even when I practised it?

"Come with me if you choose," I exclaimed, in my blind delirium; "what is there now to prevent you? Am I to remain desolate because a woman's cowardly love has no ability to trust me; to pine away in solitude for no fault of my own, whilst she perhaps will console herself with lovers by the dozen? It is beneath me. Since she has chosen to dismiss me, as if I were a servant, she shall at least see that others are ready to fill the place which she despises. Come on, Julia; we will cast our lots once more together, and my curse be upon the head of those who have brought the fate upon us."

I spoke wildly, but my words were registered. I had brought my fate upon myself, and my curse fell on my own head.

Nothing more of importance occurred until we embarked on board the steamer. Worn out by the fatigue and emotion I had experienced, I fell fast asleep upon the sofa in the sitting-room, leaving Julia Sherman to make all the arrangements necessary for her own passage. When I awoke on the following day my brief excitement had passed, but had been replaced by a sullen resolve to perform what I had promised, although I was fully conscious of the folly of which I had been guilty in placing myself once more in that thralldom from which it had already cost me so much to get free.

I did one thing which gave me satisfaction before I left England. I sat down and penned a letter to my cousins, the Lascelles, in which I apologised for my conduct of the day before, and entreated them to attribute it to the amount of liquor I had imbibed, and the irritable condition to which it had reduced me. I did not say a word about Julia Sherman, or allude to the trouble which was driving me from home ; but I prophesied a speedy return, and begged them not to permit my recent behaviour to make any difference in the cordiality of our next meeting.

At one o'clock the steamer started. As we were paddling slowly past the quay at Southampton, and I loitered by the side of the vessel, curiously observing the crowd of people we were leaving behind us, with their eager faces pressed forward to gain a last look at their friends, I suddenly caught sight of Thomas Logan. I could not be mistaken ; for his freckled countenance, sinister glance, and red hair, bore no parallel in the world for me ; and I turned away from the contemplation of the man with a shudder, for which I afterwards reproached myself. He might have come down with the single-hearted intention of bidding me farewell, though a little too late ; yet his face had appeared to wear a look of triumph, and I considered his presence at my departure was an omen of ill for my return.

The short voyage passed as slowly to me as anything else would have done in the state of mind under which I laboured. With the exception of the little variation caused by a few hours' stay at Gibraltar and Malta, there was no break to the monotony of smoking in sullen solitude and striving to pierce the dark clouds which enveloped my future. I supposed that in due course of time I should return to England and take up the duties of life where I had dropped them ; but I could not see that it would make much difference to any one whether I did so or not. I might live to old age, win a name for myself, even marry and bring up children, but for all that, henceforward I should be a unit on the face of the earth. I believed that, few as my years were, I had already lived out my life, and my heart within me was desolate.

Whilst on board I saw very little of Julia Sherman. Our cabins were at different ends of the vessel, and I was particular never to let any but the most ordinary salutation pass between

us. I had better reasons for adopting this line of conduct than the mere fact that I was indifferent to her presence. There were ladies in the steamer, and I had too much respect for them and for myself to be boastful of my folly.

I hoped that, once on shore, they would not be sufficiently interested in me to make themselves acquainted with my mode of life. But I had miscalculated the curiosity which is engendered in a small society by a want of occupation. Naturally, when we arrived at Alexandria, Julia and I disembarked together. I waited until all the rest had gone, and managed it as quietly as possible, but no amount of caution availed to insure secrecy. The passengers for India had left again by the next day, but a few Europeans remained at Alexandria, and of those few, the ladies, with whom I had been on bowing terms, cut me the next time I met them. It was strange that such a trivial circumstance should affect me, for in general I cared little for public opinion, but I suppose it was the last feather that broke the camel's back, for it made me quite reckless. I first vented my indignation by upbraiding the unfortunate cause of my annoyance, whose patience with me at this crisis of my fate should have provoked my gratitude instead, and then, in one of those fits of childish insanity which occasionally seize on disappointed men, I needlessly exposed myself to the intemperate climate, and fell a victim to fever, four days after I had landed in the country.

The attack was a sharp one, although it did not last very long, but it left me prostrated and exceedingly weak. When I was sufficiently recovered to recommence taking notice of such things as surrounded me, I found that I was lying in one of the rooms at the principal hotel, which formed part of a square. The large open windows were shaded by green jalousies, the floor was covered with matting, the bed on which I lay was enveloped in net curtains. At the casement, peeping furtively through a lath of the venetians sat Julia Sherman, pale and quiet as a mouse, whilst at the bedside was an English doctor who had been called in to attend me, and who was counting the pulsations in my wrist.

"What's the matter?" I exclaimed: "have I been ill?"

"So, so," he replied, soothingly, "you have had a slight attack of fever; but you will be yourself again in a few days,

thanks to the attention which has been shown you by this lady."

He then proceeded to tell me that Julia had taken no rest since I had been seized ; that she had nursed me day and night, and that if she was not careful she would be ill herself.

I was too weak during that first interview to attach much meaning to his recital ; but subsequently he repeated it so often that I should have been senseless not to understand him. Every visit he paid me, he spent in dilating on the devotion which this girl had shown during my illness ; he believed nothing could exceed it ; he even averred that I owed my life to her care, until I began to suspect that he admired the blue eyes and golden hair himself.

But his words were not without their effect ; I commenced to feel more affectionate towards Julia than I had ever done before ; and the girl's behaviour during this period certainly justified my gratitude. She nearly wore herself out, as the vainest and most fickle of women will occasionally do in time of need, in attending to my wants ; and when I once more stood upon my feet, I was ready to acknowledge that, broken down as I had been by trouble which had made me reckless, I should probably have died without her aid. I had not been long pronounced convalescent before I began to inquire if no letters had come for me since my arrival in Alexandria. The question produced a whole bundle of newspapers and letters which had been received by the succeeding mail, and reserved, by the doctor's order, until I was strong enough to be trusted with them. As I glanced at their superscriptions my heart warmed at the sympathy of my friends. I recognised the handwriting of each of my sisters ; of my mother ; of Jack Lascelles ; and even of uncle Jabez. Had my misfortune softened all hearts towards me ? I tore open the envelopes with trembling eagerness : perhaps I might hear intelligence of my love ; perhaps receive the assurance of her wish for a reconciliation. But no ! that thought was too big for me even then. I turned white and faint at the mere idea, and Julia flew for a glass of water.

"Put by the letters till to-morrow, Gerald," she whispered ; "you are not strong enough." But I pushed away the water and set myself again to my task. If the effort killed me, I must learn what they all had to say upon the subject. The

first letter which I perused was from Beatrice. It was dated a fortnight after my departure. It was very brief : I give it in full.

"MY DEAR GERALD,

"What *is* the meaning of the *extraordinary* paragraph which appeared in the 'Court Record' a few days after you left England? *Of course* you know all about it, or how could it be there? but I must confess that your behaviour on the subject has been *perfectly unparalleled*, and that it has caused us all the deepest distress. *If* such is the case, *why* have you concealed it from your family? You have *greatly disappointed* me, and I may say the same for Henry. If you had *no consideration* for yourself, you *might* have remembered those with whom you have become connected by marriage. I cannot recall any circumstance in my life that has so *completely* upset me. What *the family* will say to it I cannot imagine.

"Your affectionate sister,

"BEATRICE CLAREMONT."

This epistle, with its torrent of dashes and accusations, took me so entirely by surprise, that after reading it several times, I had gained no inkling of its meaning. Was it my ruptured engagement that had so disappointed my sister? and yet if I remembered rightly she had not bestowed a very warm approval on my choice. She mentioned the 'Court Record;' a number of that paper lay before me; I concluded it was the same, and snatching it up, searched feverishly for the paragraph in question. At last I hit on it amongst the fashionable intelligence :—

"Mr Gerald Estcourt, son of the late Parton Estcourt, M.P., and better known amongst us as the author of two popular novels, left Southampton for Alexandria last Saturday, with the intention of collecting materials for a forthcoming work, accompanied, we understand, by Mrs Estcourt."

As I read the foregoing announcement, I swore at the folly of the penny-a-liners, who had fabricated such trash to fill their columns, but I was also ready to smile at the importance attached to it by my irascible sister. But my mood soon changed. Gertrude's letter, which proved to be on the same subject, made me cast my eye in breathless haste over the

contents of all the others, when I found each one was set to a similar tune. By submitting them to the reader my surprise will be better imagined than described.

“DEAR GERALD,

“I think it was most unkind of you to come to Curzon Street, as you did that evening, and tell me an absurd fabrication of your having broken off your engagement, and make me go about spreading the news in the family, when you were married all the while. We saw it in the shipping intelligence the very next day, and of course everybody thought it was Ada Penryln that you had married, until I went and called upon her and ascertained the truth. She seemed quite as disgusted as we are about it ; she declined even to discuss the subject with me ; but when I told her I thought she had had a very fortunate escape, she said she *knew* that she had. *Everybody* is talking about it in town, and there is but *one* opinion—that you have behaved *disgracefully*. And I never *can* forgive you for not having told me of it that night. I’ll never receive another confidence from you, *never, never*.

“Yours affectionately,

“GERTRUDE LYNDON.”

The next was from my cousin Jack :—

“DEAR JERRY,

“What the deuce is the meaning of ‘*Mr and Mrs Gerald Estcourt*’ being put down in the passengers’ list of to-day’s ‘Times?’ *Who* is with you, and how could you have been so foolish as to let them make such a mistake? It’s all over the place, and your people are just mad about it. I got your letter from Southampton ; thanks for it, old fellow—it’ll take something tougher than a few glasses of brandy to part you and me. George sends you all kinds of remembrances.

“Yours truly,

“JACK LASCELLES.”

“P.S.—Do make up a good story to satisfy your sisters ; you’ve got into a nice scrape, my boy, *I* can tell you.”

Then came that of old uncle Jabez :—

“DEAR NEPHEW,

“I hear you’ve broken off your engagement with Mrs Penryhn. I didn’t think you were such a fool ; but if the Southampton list of the passengers by the *Sultan* is correct, you’re a greater one still. *Who is ‘Mrs Estcourt?’* Write at once, and give such an absurd statement the lie. I send you the ‘Times’ to see for yourself.

Yours,

“JABEZ ESTCOURT.”

The next was from my mother in Paris :—

“MY DEAR GERALD,

“The inattention which of late years you have shown to all my wishes has deterred me hitherto from expressing the objections which I entertained towards your proposed close connexion with one so given to the world and its pleasures as Mrs Penryhn. In the course of the last week, however, I have received intelligence through your sister Gertrude of the dissolution of that engagement, for which I thanked Heaven, trusting that you might be guided in your next choice to a partner who should indeed be an help meet for you. What, then, is this report which has reached us even here, that you are already married ? I could scarcely believe it to be the case, until Mons. Le Sage was good enough to bring me several English papers confirming the news that you have taken out a wife with you to Alexandria. It is perhaps vain for me to observe here that I think you certainly might have had the grace to consult *me* before taking such a step, and that a *mother* is entitled to *some* consideration on the part of her children ; for you have been too long subjected to other influences for such words to be of any avail, but at least we, that is Liliás and myself, (for I presume that you have not forgotten that I *am* your mother and she your sister, though your behaviour would appear to say so,) are justified in asking for some *little* explanation of a rumour which has greatly startled us. If it is indeed the case that, without seeking advice, you have decided your fate by marriage, I trust that your usual rashness and want of discrimination have been in this instance overruled for good, and that you are blest with a Hannah, a Rachel,

or a Sarai with whom to pass your life—that the unbelieving husband may yet be sanctified by the believing wife.—With your sister's love, and trusting soon to receive from you some more explicit account of this painful matter,

“Believe me,

“Your affectionate mother,

“MARY ESTCOURT.”

The last letter I read was that of Emmeline. Two or three times had I taken it up and laid it down again, but felt too great a coward to peruse it. I need not have been afraid—my dearest sister never wounded me, unless it was unintentionally :—

“DEAREST GERALD,

“I hardly know how to write to you. Gerty told me that you were going to send me a letter from Southampton, but, if sent, it never reached me. Of course I have heard all about yourself and Ada. I should have made myself very miserable over your leaving England so suddenly, had I not felt that it must be a far greater blow to you than to any of us. Dearest Gerald, how did it happen? As soon as I heard the news, I went up to London for a few days to see if I could be of any use to Ada; but although she appeared pleased to meet me, I could not ascertain what her feelings were on the subject. She begged me from the first not to mention your name; so of course I was tongue-tied, and it never passed her lips. She seemed just the same as usual, however, and I cannot help thinking it was *her* fault more than yours, particularly as Thomas Logan seemed to be there continually; and if she grieved *your* loss very much, I am sure she could not bear to see *him*, whom you so disliked. I cannot understand it at all. I have seen of course, in common with others, the report going about the papers of your marriage. I do not believe it, and laugh at Beatrice and Gertrude for doing so. They admit that the name may be a mistake, but make all kinds of horrible suggestions, to which I will give no greater credence. I cannot believe so badly of my brother. Better that you should have married, however rashly, than disgrace yourself and us. God bless you, dearest Gerald!

“Ever your loving sister,

“EMMELINE TALBOT.”

As the paper dropped from my hand, my face was bathed in a cold perspiration. It was evening : I was sitting at the open window of my bedroom, which looked upon the square ; the green jalousies were drawn up, and I turned my weary eyes upon the peaceful scene which it revealed. Here a string of camels, moving their sullen faces from side to side, and stretching out their long necks as if to attack the passers-by, were being slowly marched across the dusty soil, the bells which hung about them giving forth a dull uncertain tinkle, in unison with their shambling gait ; there, an Egyptian lady veiled to the eyes, and looking about as animated as a bundle of old clothes, was taking her evening ride, sitting astride upon her mule, which was carefully led for her by a servant. In the distance, the tired donkeys, which had been carrying parties of Europeans and natives all through the heat and burden of the day, were being driven home at last ; whilst the flower-girls, with emptied baskets, sat about on the doorsteps, and laughed and chatted together ; and an occasional cheer coming from the far-off *cabarets* was the only sound which proclaimed that the city was alive. Everything looked restful and at peace ; only my heart was warring with mankind. I thought of the letters which I had just received ; of the newspaper paragraphs which had produced them, and wondered how the error could have arisen ; *who* could have put down Julia's name in the list of passengers as that of my wife ? I knew that I had not attended to these things myself, but neither had there been any one to attend to them for me. Who then had been sufficiently interested to spread the report for the sake of ill-nature, (if ill-nature it was ;) who had even been aware that the girl travelled with me ?

Yet, putting aside the author of the mischief, (and indeed, the only cause to which I then attributed it was my own carelessness, by which the task had been left perhaps to the keeper of the Southampton hotel,) the deed was done ; wrongfully or by mistake, the report had gained credence amongst my own people, and I must contradict or account for it, one or the other. As I pondered over this difficulty, I foresaw the work it would be to disabuse the minds of my mother and sisters of the idea they had conceived ; dirty work too, unless I told the truth, which to some of them I felt would be impossible. Could I, I asked myself, deliberately sit down to

tell Emmeline, after the reception of her affectionate and trustful letter, that I had "disgraced myself and them;" that the "horrible suggestions" were nothing but truth; and that thenceforward she might believe as badly as she chose of her brother? No! I could not; I almost believed I would sooner lie. And Ada Penryhn, could I bear that she should hear such a tale of me; that from doubt and distrust I should so quickly arrive at the certainty of her contempt? But with that memory there rose another, the thought of him who seemed to be "continually" at her house.

I know it was this thought which determined me. I know that, as I sat at the open window, breathing the calm evening air, and gazing on the placid scenes which passed beneath me, my blood was burning with jealous rage and hate, and my heart was contemplating its suicide. Yet I said to myself that I yielded alone to the sentiment expressed in Emmy's letter that I had better have married, however rashly, than disgraced myself and them.

"Julia!" I exclaimed, suddenly, "come here."

She came directly in the quiet, submissive manner she had lately assumed towards me. I grasped her by the wrist.

"Look at me," I said, "look me full in the face, and tell me, as if you were standing before God, if you know of any reason why I should not marry you."

"*Marry* me!" she replied, whilst the blood rushing to her cheeks, evinced the emotion she felt at the proposal; "marry me! Gerald, will you, really?"

"That is no answer to my question," I said more gently, for the girl's evident gratitude recalled a certain debt which I had lately incurred to her; "is there any reason why you should not be my wife?"

"None, unless you know of it," she answered, with down-cast eyes.

"Then, I'll marry you on the first day that it is possible," I exclaimed, "and there's my hand on it. They thought they had caught me, did they? They shall not have the trouble of prying into my affairs for nothing."

I kept my word: a few days afterwards I made Julia Sherman my wife, and the next homeward steamer took the following note to Jack Lascelles:—

"DEAR JACK,

"Thanks to those blabbing papers, it is impossible to keep a secret now-a-days. It is true that I am married, and to Miss Sherman. We are just going on to Cairo, and I have no time for more at present ; so you can disseminate this news as you think fit.

"Yours always,

"GERALD ESTCOURT."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AFTER THE STORM.

IF it is true that a man never knows how much he can do until he tries, it is equally true that he never knows how much he can bear until he tries. On receiving the first disappointment of my life, I thought it impossible that my heart could ever again feel so much pain. A few months afterwards, my father died, and no trouble appeared to me so poignant as that occasioned by the death of a friend ; and each of these earlier losses were mere child's play compared to the sharp grief which I experienced in resigning my hopes of Ada for the second time ; yet when I was fully roused to the consciousness of the fatal error I had committed in linking my lot indissolubly with that of Julia Sherman, I believed I had never known what suffering was till then.

Each of these former troubles had had its possible, if not its probable, alleviation ; disappointed hearts may love again ; there are affections deeper than those between father and son ; and time has proved itself competent to heal the worst of breaches as the worst of woes ; but for my latest folly there was no cure. Like the maniac, who, bursting asunder all kindly restraint, insists upon cutting his own throat, though he has a vague idea the while that he is committing suicide, so I, maddened by rage and jealousy, trampled my judgment under foot, thrust my reason out of sight, and crushed every

hope of happiness, or honour, or respectability that I possessed.

It did not take me long to arrive at this knowledge, or rather, I should say, it was not long before my pride permitted me to confess that it was true. But the deed was done beyond revocation. I had made this girl *my wife*; endowed her with my father's name; placed her (the remembrance was too painful now to provoke a smile) at the "head of the family."

I owed it to her, to myself, to those who might come after us, to make the best of it. Under this conviction I resolved to return to England, from which I had now been three months absent. I had written to my immediate relatives, saying as little as possible about the antecedents of my wife, hoping they might never discover them, but merely mentioning that although not of aristocratic birth, she was a lady in appearance and manners, and I trusted that for my sake they would receive her kindly. It was easier to say this of Julia now than it would have been when I first became acquainted with her, for she had developed into a very graceful woman, and if not accomplished or intellectual, was quite capable of maintaining a conversation without betraying her humble origin, and so far I was thankful that I had been preserved against the consequences of my own rashness. But other qualities not so desirable in my wife had been hatched into life by her unexpected marriage. The quiet submission which had had its place in blinding me to the disadvantages of marrying Julia Sherman was looked for in vain in the behaviour of Mrs Gerald Estcourt. Once assured of her position, nothing could exceed the airs and graces she gave herself, and the highest-born lady in the land could not have expected more deference or been quicker to resent the least want of attention, fancied or otherwise. All her shyness deserted her; I never saw her eyes swim in tears, or her cheek mantle with blushes as they had been used to do. If I had occasion to administer a reproof, or notice an omission of duty, she received my remarks, not rebelliously, for that I would never have allowed, but in silence, with her head slightly thrown back, and a look which said plainly, "You may talk as much as you like, but I shall do as I please." Sometimes we had a serious dispute, for as I examined her character more closely, and with sadder interest,

I found that she was very light in her behaviour ; and actions which I had thought little of before, assumed a graver import now ; but although I always made her give in to me, our quarrels generally ended by my feeling that I was the vanquished one. I might find fault with her conduct, but I could not force her to change it ; the day for threatening was over ; I had elevated her to a sure position and put power in her hands, and she knew it. I might argue, and wrangle, and object, but she was Mrs Gerald Estcourt, and no words of mine could unmake her. These thoughts bore very heavily upon me as we again neared England ; but my great anxiety was to see how my wife would be received by my friends. We arrived in London, without any but my servants having had notice of our coming, and having deposited Julia in Brook Street, and ascertained that my family had left town, I first went down to Monkshood, in Hertfordshire, the country seat of my brother-in-law Claremont, in order to sound my sister Beatrice on the subject.

It was now the middle of October, and Monkshood was full of company. I arrived there late at night, and so much did I dread encountering my relations under my new condition that I slept at the Claremont Arms, and sent a note up to Beatrice the next morning to ask if I could speak to her. The message I received—a verbal one—was to say that Lady Claremont would be at home all the morning. This was not encouraging, but I was there for an especial purpose, and I resolved to carry it through ; with which design I walked up to Monkshood about eleven o'clock and was shown into my sister's private room. She was alone, looking very well, but very grave, and though she received me kindly, there was an air of compassion about her which prophesied ill for the issue of my visit.

"Well, Beatrice," I said, after our first greetings were over, "here I am again, you see. We arrived in town the day before yesterday."

"Indeed ! Town is very empty just now."

"Yes ; but I don't know that we shall stay there. Is Gerty with the Portsdownes ?"

"Gertrude and Horace are with us. Have you seen your mother ?"

"My mother ! No ; is she in England ?"

"She and Lilius have been here the last month. I thought you would have known of it. They return to Paris shortly, I believe, and Marguerite goes with them."

"Why is that?" I demanded; but as I put the question my heart suggested the answer.

"I really cannot tell you," said my sister, coldly. "I conclude mamma has her reasons for wishing to remove her from Grasslands."

I felt that it was of no use beating about the bush any longer, but it was with an effort that I forced myself to say—

"I suppose you were all very much surprised, Beatrice, to hear of my marriage?"

She changed colour directly.

"*Surprise* is no name for what we felt, Gerald; we were horrorstruck."

"Oh, come," I said, trying to speak easily, "it is not so bad as all that, Beatrice. I was foolish, I allow, to marry so hastily, but my wife is a very charming girl, as you will acknowledge when you see her. I might have done worse."

"I can hardly see how," she replied.

"Well; I might have taken an old woman for money, or a hideous woman for intellect, either of whom I should have been ashamed to introduce to you; as it is"—

"As it is, Gerald," interrupted my sister, "you have married a woman without character, of whom you ought to be doubly ashamed. You shall never introduce her to me."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"I mean that the person whom you have thought fit to make Mrs Gerald Estcourt, and with respect to whom I cannot but say you have behaved very ill in attempting to deceive us, is the same who formed the topic of a jesting conversation between Gertrude and yourself, in my presence, the season before last. I gave you my opinion then on the subject; I warned you against entanglement, and entreated you to be careful, but I little thought that my cautions would be so cruelly needed"—and here my sister drew out her pocket handkerchief, and applied it to her eyes.

I saw that the truth was known, and it would be useless to attempt further dissimulation on the subject. I decided therefore to appeal to my sister's affection to help me out of the scrape into which I had fallen.

"All that you say, dear Beatrice, is unfortunately true. Yet my error lies, not in having married Julia now, but in *not* having married her before. You will not therefore, I trust, visit my sin upon her head. There was no entanglement or persuasion in the matter; I made her my wife of my own free will."

"More shame to you," said my sister, from behind her handkerchief.

"But surely it was the right thing for me to do," I continued. "I was the cause of the poor girl losing her character, and I am the only one who can repair the loss. It is a fault on the right side, Beatrice."

"You thought a great deal of this when you engaged yourself to Ada Penryhn, Gerald."

The familiar mention of that name struck through me like a dart. How long it seemed since I had heard it spoken! I trembled with eagerness to learn something of her welfare, but I dared not trust myself to put a question concerning it. Yet the mere thought of my lost love gave me confidence to open my heart to my sister.

"Oh, Beatrice!" I exclaimed, passionately, "you know that I did not—you know that this marriage has been born of pique and disappointment; but the thing is done. I have fixed my fate irrevocably, and if my own relations refuse to help me in my perplexity, I shall go down, *down*, until there is an end of me altogether." And as I concluded speaking, I covered my face with my hands.

"Poor boy!" she said, weeping; "poor dear boy! I wish I could do anything for you. I wish there was anything to be *done*."

The pitying tones of her voice somewhat reassured me.

"Come and see Julia, Beatrice;" I urged; "receive her kindly for my sake, and others will do the same."

She shook her head.

"I can't do that, Gerald."

"Will you not even call on her?" I asked, in dismay.

Beatrice removed her handkerchief from her eyes, and stared at me.

"You surely do not expect me to do so?"

"Not *expect* you to pay a common civility to *my wife*—to *your* sister, Beatrice?"

"Stop, Gerald; don't presume to speak to me of her in those terms. She may be your wife—we cannot help that—more's the pity; but you will find that none of us will stoop quite so low as to acknowledge her as a sister."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, as the thought of what their opposition would prove to both of us flashed across me, "are you women all alike? Is there no pity amongst you? Is Gertrude of the same opinion as yourself?"

"You shall ask her, Gerald, she is close at hand;" and stepping to the door, Beatrice called her sister, who answered the summons in person. Gertrude tripped in lightly, as if nothing was the matter, and kissed me affectionately several times.

"Well, you horrid creature!" she said, on the conclusion of the ceremonies, "I have been waiting to come in for the last hour. What have you been talking about with Beatrice? I declare he looks older, Bee, or browner, or something since he went away. You're a nice fellow, Master Jerry, to go and play us such a trick."

"Don't laugh about it, Gertrude," said Beatrice, imploringly, "it is no subject for joking. Gerald is angry because I tell him that it is impossible, in my position, I can notice his wife, and he wishes to ascertain your ideas upon the same point. You had better tell them to him."

"As to what?" asked Gertrude, elevating her eyebrows.

"As to calling upon Mrs Estcourt," I answered, rather haughtily, for the manner of their discussion had touched my pride. "Of course, as her sister-in-law, it is your part to take the initiative in making her acquaintance."

"Oh! I can't do it," said Gertrude hastily, with a toss of the head.

"Now, my dear sisters," I said, more humbly than I felt, for I saw that a great stake was at issue, "I am very well aware that you have good cause to be annoyed at my marriage, but the point is, that no amount of annoyance can undo it. With respect to her birth, I know that my wife is not on a level with yourselves; but a woman is raised by marriage to her husband's position, and therefore Julia is now as much a lady by law as she is in appearance and manners. Setting this, however, on one side, all I ask of you is to pay her the common courtesy of a morning call. I have no wish to thrust her upon

you as a companion," (at this juncture I perceived my sisters first exchange glances, and then with elevated heads slightly sniff the air.) "but, as my wife, I hardly see that you can do less; and were it not that I have somewhat given society cause for gossip by this marriage, I would not humble myself to ask even so much at your hands. When this temporary annoyance has blown over, Mrs Gerald Estcourt will probably occupy too good a position to require the patronage of any one."

I paused for an answer; Gertrude, never at a loss, was quick to furnish it.

"Well, so far as I am concerned, she must rest content with her 'good position,' Gerald, for I am sure Horace would never let me call on her, even if I wished it. I wonder," she continued, giggling, "at your assurance in asking such a thing! that *Beatrice* and *I* should call upon—a—a *woman* who"——

"Stop, Gertrude!" I exclaimed, sternly; "I'll thank you to remember that you are speaking of *my wife*."

She was silent, for I had spoken loudly, but *Beatrice* took up the theme.

"If she were a dozen times your wife, Gerald, it could never unmake her what she is! You have disgraced us and yourself, there is no doubt about it; it has been a wretched business throughout, and one of which the discussion can never be productive of anything but pain."

"Yes; and fancy your behaving to *Ada Penryhn* as you did," put in Gertrude, who had again found her tongue, "and after all marrying a person whom no one will visit! I little imagined, when I said I was glad your engagement was broken off, what would be your next step,—I am sure I wish I had died,—I wish we had all been dead before such a thing as this had happened to us. And then you want to make your sisters talked of by being seen in public with her."

"Come, come! we have had enough of this," I replied, testily. "You have behaved systematically throughout. When this woman was living with me unlawfully you treated the matter as a careless jest, not worthy of your serious consideration; when I conceived an honourable attachment, you set your faces against it, and tried all you could to dissuade me from the contemplation of marriage; and now that I have taken a wife, however unadvisedly, and intend, so far as in me lies, to make her a faithful husband, you refuse to lend your counte-

nance to the deed, even when your only brother asks it as a favour. So be it—my wife will doubtless be able to get on without your powerful patronage; but I would have you know that, whatever she has been, I shall stand by her now, and those for whom she is not good enough must relinquish the pleasure of my society.”

I had risen from my seat on the commencement of this address, and as I finished it I left the room. Gertrude began to hum an air gaily, significant of her utter indifference to what I said or thought; but Beatrice followed me into the passage.

“You will stay with us, Gerald, will you not, at least for to-day? Are we to be utterly divided?”

When I thought of her resolution, and that the reason of it might last all our lives, my heart failed, and I was almost ready to accept her hospitality. Was I to be cut off from intimacy with my nearest relations for ever? But I remembered the obligations I had taken on myself, and determined to resist all overtures which did not extend to my wife.

“I trust not, Beatrice; but I will neither eat nor drink in a house where Julia is not admitted. I am going back to town now to see whether others are as obdurate as yourselves. If they prove so—why then, I’ll defy the world, and separate myself from every one of you. You must make what excuses you think fit to Claremont and Lyndon; perhaps under the circumstances they will understand my repugnance to facing a company of strangers. And now, good-bye, and I hope, for both our sakes, that you will come to a better mind upon this subject;” and so saying, I left Monkshood.

My wife had been perfectly aware of the mission on which I had been bound; but when I returned to Brook Street she did not put any questions respecting the upshot of my interview with my sisters. Probably she took my silence as an answer; more probably still, her instinct had made her anticipate what that answer would be. As for myself, I had hardly realised, until my sisters’ plain speaking opened my eyes, the dilemma in which I should be placed by a marriage with her. I had viewed her as a graceful, pretty woman, fit, as far as appearance went, to adorn any society; and little dreamed that her antecedents and mine were so widely known, or would be so generally remembered. Now, I saw that if my relations refused to acknowledge her, her position would be

little better than it had been, whilst mine was ruined. I had ascertained my mother's temporary address, but I had not the courage to seek a personal interview with her. I sat down, therefore, and wrote long letters to her and Emmeline, in which I told them of my visit to Monkshood, and that I depended upon them not to uphold Beatrice and Gertrude in their most uncharitable determination : especially I appealed to my mother's sense of religion, and begged her to exercise all her charity on behalf of my wife, and not to visit my evil propensities upon the head of an innocent girl, whose worst fault had been loving me too much.

I wrote all this, because I felt that it behoved me to make every possible effort to place Julia's conduct in the best light with the women of my family ; but I believed, as I had ever done when in my senses, that there had been less love of me than of the position she had obtained, in her steady pursuance of myself. My depression and silence on the subject of my sister's intentions appeared to give her no concern ; she was too much elated at returning to Brook Street in the character of my wife, to have leisure to think about anything else, or to care by what consequences to ourselves the act might be followed ; and it is likely that the idea of being introduced to them would have been more distressing to her than that of being left alone. I envied her stoicism as I nervously awaited the answers to my letters, hardly liking to stir out of doors until I was able to tell my friends that my wife had been received by my family.

And, meanwhile, the truth which my father had striven to impress upon me as a child, kept ringing in my ears to keep me company. "You will not be able to afford to commit one action that will not bear the light of the world's bull's-eye turned upon it. A false step from you will jeopardise the credit of the whole race."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GERALD SUPS FULL OF MORTIFICATIONS.

I HAD hopes, however, of my mother ; hopes that, should justice lead her to blame my conduct in the past, it must still force her to confess that, whether of free choice or by necessity, I had done what was right in marrying the woman whom in the eyes of the world I had betrayed.

But in this supposition I only showed my ignorance of the wonderful instability of the principles which Lady Mary professed to hold. Her answer arrived only too soon, and was more bitter than anything conveyed by the words of Beatrice or Gertrude. She wondered at my audacity in addressing her on such a subject ; averred that she had hurried to England as soon as a hint of the scandalous truth had reached her with the sole view of snatching Marguerite from the contamination of a possible association with my *wife*, (the last noun being underscored more than once, as if my mother yet doubted whether the unfortunate woman could really lay claim to that distinction ;) and it was hardly probable, under such circumstances, that she would be willing to receive her at her house ; in fact she positively refused to see, or let Julia be seen by herself or my sisters ; and was so unguarded in what she wrote that I felt, as I finished its perusal, that no amount of apologies made thereafter could do away with the insult conveyed to my wife by the wording of this epistle. I had received it by the early post : naturally upset and very much disappointed, not only for the present annoyance, but because the mother I had loved, and who had seemed to love me, appeared to be retreating each year farther into the past, I wandered out shortly after breakfast, and tried to dissipate the unpleasant feelings which possessed me by a brisk walk in the Park. Despairing of success, in the course of half an hour I returned, and going straight into the dining-room, was surprised to find Thomas Logan seated there in friendly converse with my wife. Julia was of rather a lazy and untidy disposition : she seldom

rose early or dressed for breakfast, and on the present occasion was in more *déshabillée* than usual, being attired in a rose-coloured robe-de-chambre, becoming enough, but still a robe-de-chambre, with her hair plaited for the purposes of crimping, and thrust into a tawdry blue silk and pearl net. She was talking with great animation as I entered, but my presence appeared to have the effect of quieting her, for she dropped her share of the conversation, whilst I looked from her to my cousin, and from my cousin to her, in silent surprise.

"You should have told Saunders you were not ready to receive visitors, Julia," I said, at last, in a voice of displeasure, whilst Thomas Logan rose to greet me with a self-confident air which further excited my spleen.

"Cousins mustn't be reckoned amongst common visitors, Estcourt," he exclaimed, as he took the hand I could not but proffer him. "I thought I wouldn't lose any time in coming to *congratulate* you upon your *marriage*."

There was a covert look in his eyes as he uttered the words; a mock fervour in his voice which sorely roused my temper, but I swallowed my indignation, and paid him back only with a glance. I read in the first moment why he had come, not to congratulate but to triumph: I thought of him admitted to Ada's drawing-room, free to go now as he listed, and I with no more right to expel him thence: and I would have given anything to be able to fell him where he stood. He was too prudent, however, to allude to forbidden subjects before me; he confined himself to such as were legal, but could sting.

"So Julia tells me you've been to Monkshood," he continued; "I suppose you'll be going there together before the party breaks up. Who do you visit first, Estcourt?"

"I do not know," I answered shortly; "nothing is yet decided."

"Your mother is looking deucedly well, isn't she?"

"I have not yet seen her."

"You don't mean to say so—why she was over at our place yesterday."

If anything could have astonished me it would have been the fact of Lady Mary deigning to visit not only a relation of my father, but the one whom she had professed to dislike the most of them all, my aunt Anne; but I was beginning to become accustomed to surprises at my mother's hands; she was

a true weathercock ; and had my grandmother lived I should doubtless before long have seen Lady Mary installed at Wiversdale, and as much on the side of the Estcourts as she had formerly been against them. But I was too much wrapt up in my own troubles to have space for wonderment at others' inconsistencies.

"Was she, indeed ? Well ! that proves she has a shorter memory than I gave her credit for ; so perhaps she has already forgotten that I have returned to England."

"I suppose your sister Emmeline is coming up to welcome the bride."

"I really don't know, Logan ; I have not as yet had time to make myself acquainted with the probable movements of my family, but it is not unlikely. Meanwhile, I must beg you to excuse my wife, for I know she must have a great deal of unpacking to do. Julia, you had better go to your room, and dress yourself before you come down again."

I was determined that if he would sit there, and cast his taunts in my face, she should not be witness of my discomfiture, neither should he treat her with less deference than he should have done any lady on whom I had chosen to bestow my name. She rose to do my bidding, though unwillingly, and shook hands with my cousin.

"Good-bye, Julia."

"Good-bye, Tom."

I felt that I should make myself absurd if I resented the familiarity in public, yet I had difficulty in preventing myself doing so. The antecedents of my wife rendered it especially necessary that she should be reticent and careful in her behaviour towards the men who frequented the house ; but it had grieved me already to perceive that, without restraint, it was not likely she would be so. Left alone with me, my cousin had no further excuse for staying ; my answers to his remarks were brief and indifferent, and after a few minutes of awkward converse he rose abruptly and took his leave. As the hall-door closed behind me, I called the servant into the dining-room, and gave him strict orders never to admit any gentlemen in the mornings except they came to see me.

"You must be aware it is not calling time," I concluded ; "your mistress was not prepared to receive visitors."

"I knew that, sir," replied the man, respectfully. "I told

the gentleman you were not at home, and that my mistress had not finished breakfast ; but Mrs Estcourt opened the dining-room door and called Mr Logan in."

Still further put out by this intelligence, I sought my wife's dressing-room.

"How long have you known Logan, Julia?" I demanded abruptly, as I entered.

She coloured, and became confused, finally remarking that she had met him first in my company, which was true.

"But whilst we were separated—did you see anything of him then?"

"Sometimes—once or twice I did."

I bit my lip, the intelligence was not pleasant to me. I knew what Julia's "once or twice" probably meant.

"Is that the case? are you telling me the truth, Julia?" I asked, looking her full in the face, for she had deceived me so often that I was generally compelled to be very searching in my questions if I wished to ascertain the correctness of her statements. She could not meet my eyes in the present instance, but she continued to maintain stoutly that it was the truth. She had met him once or twice since the time she had left me.

"Met him! Then he did not visit you?"

"I said *met* him, Gerald, didn't I?" She was beating about the bush again.

"Did he know your address?"

"He may have ; I can't be sure."

"Did he ever call on you at your house, Julia?"

Put thus directly, she could not avoid the question.

"I think he did—once or twice."

"You *think* he did ; you *know* he did, Julia : why will you attempt to deceive me?"

She did not answer, and I continued—

"I am very sorry to hear it ; he is the last person in the world I should wish to feel an interest in any woman I liked, or any woman I liked to feel an interest in ; and if this was my opinion before our marriage, it is doubly so now. I should have cautioned you at any time against cultivating his acquaintance, but now I strictly forbid it. I was annoyed at hearing him address you by your Christian name, and you return the compliment ; it is a habit of which you must break

yourself : it is what no lady does indiscriminately, and what I would never sanction in my wife except with very near relations. You will remember what I say."

I had tried to speak with mildness, for Julia was very quickly moved to tears ; but I was annoyed by her conduct, and still more by her duplicity in never giving me a hint of her intimacy with my cousin. We had now been married for three months ; plenty of time for her to tell me all about it, especially as I had more than once spoken to her of Tom Logan and our early dislike to one another. I was still talking quietly to her of my wish, now that we had returned to England, that she would abandon her dressing-gown at the breakfast-table, and drawing the conclusion from her keeping her back systematically towards me that she was not over-pleased at my marital lecture, when a tap on the dressing-room door prefaced the announcement that Colonel Talbot was below waiting to speak to me. In a moment my feelings of uneasy depression vanished. I sprang from my seat, cautioning Julia not to join us until she was dressed, and ran down-stairs to meet my brother-in-law. He was standing in the hall.

"My dear Talbot," I exclaimed, wringing his hand, "how kind this is of you. I am so rejoiced to see you ; do come in."

"Are you alone?" he said, peeping into the open dining-room door as he spoke.

"Quite so ; breakfast has not yet been cleared away ; will you take any, Talbot?"

"No, I thank you, my dear fellow ; I have just finished my own. I came round early for fear I might miss you later. We only came up to town yesterday, and are in Conduit Street. Emmy is very anxious to see you, Gerald."

"Is she ? God bless her !" I exclaimed ; "but why didn't she come with you now, Talbot ? *she* hasn't any scruples of intruding too early upon us, I hope."

A shade passed over his face, but he answered—

"She is very fatigued, Estcourt ; she only took two days to clear out of Grasslands. True, we had packed the heaviest articles beforehand, and have left the live stock to your tender mercies until we shall be settled ; but there was plenty left for Emmeline to do."

"Cleared out of Grasslands!" I exclaimed, with astonishment; "and what the d—l have you done that for?"

Talbot laughed incredulously.

"Why, my dear Estcourt, you don't mean to tell me that you expected us to occupy your place for the term of our natural lives. Of course we thought of moving as soon as we heard of this—this marriage of yours; and directly Emmeline received the letter announcing your return, we commenced preparations for a move. We have left the house in first-rate order,—quite ready for your reception when you choose to inhabit it; and I think you will be pleased with the state of the farm and land. For our own parts, we intend to remain in London until we have heard of some little place within a convenient distance of it, where Emmy can have her fowls, and I my pigs; and where we shall rusticate, please heaven, till the cares of Miss Ethel's *début* bring us up here again."

"And who is to look after the estate meanwhile?" I asked, almost fiercely.

Talbot stared at me.

"Why, yourself, my dear fellow, of course; who else? Now that you are married, your duty will be live upon your own ground, and amongst your own people."

"Then the ground and the people may rot before they see me there," I exclaimed, bitterly. "*I* go to occupy the house where my father lived and died; where he was respected and honoured: *I*, with my blighted fame; my sham respectability, my"—but here, remembering to whom and of whom I spoke, my voice fell, and the sentence remained unfinished. My brother-in-law rose from his seat.

"You are wrong, Gerald, in speaking thus: you are making a bad matter worse; but **Emmy** will have more influence over you than I can. Come and see her; she is anxiously awaiting my return."

"Won't you wait and be introduced to my wife first?" I said, almost entreatingly; "she will be down in a minute."

But the worthy fellow took alarm at the mere idea, and with an increase of colour made for the door.

"I think it would be best not, Estcourt; at least, not to-day—that is to say, I am in a great hurry—promised Emmy to be back directly, and am not dressed in accordance with

etiquette for a morning call. But you'll come with me, won't you? Your sister can talk to you so much better than I can, and she is longing to see you."

I seized my hat, left a message for my wife with the servant, and followed him with a sigh. I understood too well the real reason of his hesitation and various excuses. He did not wish to make the acquaintance of a woman whom he had no intention of introducing to his wife. Our conversation on the way to Conduit Street was constrained. I told him of my mother's letter and the interview I had had with my sisters at Monkshood, and appealed to him to support my sense of their injustice and pride. But although Talbot and I had ever been the best of friends, he did not appear in the present instance to coincide readily with my opinions. On the contrary, he attempted, though very gently, to defend the insults I had received, and to find excuses for the conduct which had outraged me; and I felt that he, with the rest of the world, was turning against me, and grew morose and uncommunicative in consequence. The smile with which Emmy welcomed me; the burst of tears with which she clung to my neck, and sobbed forth her joy at meeting me again, would have been sufficient to dispel any amount of moroseness; and indeed it so lightened my heart that for a few minutes I was myself again, and able to inquire unaffectedly after the welfare of my mother, Lillas, and Marguerite, and to praise and pet little Ethel.

"*You* do not turn against me, Emmy!" I exclaimed shortly afterwards as, Talbot and his daughter having left us alone, we sat on the sofa together. She put her arm round my neck as she had been wont to do when I was a child, and looked me fondly in the face.

"No, Gerald—nor ever will; but oh! this is a sad affair. Why did you go and do the only thing which forbids my helping you, as my heart would prompt me to do?"

"In what way, Emmy?"

"I mean, if you had fallen into any other kind of scrape, debt, or distress of any sort, you know that I would have been the first to come to your aid, only too thankful to be of use to you; but by forming this unhappy marriage you have completely tied my hands. I would do anything for you, Gerald, that did not affect those to whom I owe a higher

duty ; but even were I not obliged to submit in this, as in all things, to Walter's wishes, I do not see how I could act otherwise. Ethel is a child at present, but a few years will see her a woman, and I *could* not, I should not *dare* to let her visit freely at your house. I am very sorry, dear Gerald," she continued, tears commencing to steal down her face again, as she watched the inflexible look which my countenance had assumed ; "but it is not my fault. Why did you go and make us all so wretched ?"

"That is enough, Emmy," I answered quietly, for I knew that her grief was genuine. "I confess I expected a different answer to my letter from you, but of course if Talbot is afraid that my wife will contaminate you, there is no other line of action open. If you were free to do as you wished, however, would you call on Julia ?"

She glanced at me timidly.

"With Ethel, Gerald ?"

"Yes ; with Ethel—why not ?"

Emmeline considered a moment, and then shook her head.

"I would go by myself, Gerald, to please you ; but I could not take my daughter to your house. Your wife may be a very true-hearted, simple-minded girl—she may be a much better woman than I am ; I should be very sorry to affirm she was not ; yet still—there is the onus clinging to her of having lived with you before marriage, and no mother would like to see her daughters walking or driving about with such a companion. I am afraid this sounds very harsh, dear Gerald, but you put the question to me."

"I know I did," I answered determinedly, "and you are right to give me a candid answer. You were my last hope, Emmeline, but I was a fool to indulge it. I understand it fully now : my wife is my married mistress, nothing more : she may become the mother of my sons, of daughters, fair and pure as your own ; still—she was my mistress, and that fact will never be forgotten against her. She may be as elegant as Beatrice, as pretty as Gertrude, as good a wife as yourself ; but that one fatal error to which I tempted her will sink her as surely as though she had been rescued from the scum of the earth. Because a priest and a ring did not figure on the scene quite as soon as they should have done,

Julia is considered unworthy to mix in the society of women whose shame should be that a priest and a ring ever united them to one, since it is impotent to do so to more. I am not speaking of my sisters now, mind ; but you know well that your combined opposition to receive her as my wife will have the effect of shutting her out from all society whatever."

"I am very sorry, Gerald," reiterated Emmeline, "but I did not take my cue from Beatrice or Gertrude. I knew from the first that it must be so. However natural their decision, your description of their cruel manner of conveying it to you shocked me greatly."

"*Natural their decision!*" I repeated, with scorn ; "unnatural, you meant to say. Gertrude, who flirts openly with every man she meets, and Beatrice, who receives and does honour to the Countess of Panama and Lady Mac Riggle, two of the most infamous old women, if rumour tells truth, to be found in this capital, are fearful of being talked about if seen in public with my poor little wife. But 'tis the way of the world, Emmeline. When Julia was my mistress, I was received everywhere ; now that I have married her, I shall in all probability be cut by half my acquaintance, and my greatest foes will be those of my own household."

I spoke bitterly ; but I was not so much angry as miserable. I saw that Emmeline could not act in opposition to her husband ; but the conviction brought me no comfort. My dear sister was so anxious to convince me of her unaltered affection, and her distress at the turn affairs had taken, that she fell to caressing me, and the tender tones and touches broke me down. My pride melted, and the whole story came out. I told all that I could of my quarrel with my betrothed ; of my subsequent agony of mind, and the means I adopted for its distraction ; of Julia's unexpected appearance and offer ; of the mistake in the newspapers ; and my sudden resolve, founded upon jealousy and disappointment, to marry her in defiance of the world's opinion. It was a broken narrative—broken by many an exclamation of pity, surprise, or regret from my auditor, and intermingled with many a blessing ; but it was over at last, and I felt more comfortable for the confession. Whatever society thought of me now, I knew that

one true heart would judge me fairly, and whilst it lamented my folly, take also the chain of circumstances which led to it into consideration.

"But, Gerald," inquired Emmeline, when she could better command her voice, "why did you not answer the letter which Ada sent after you to Southampton, since you tell me you were not so overcome as to be unable to notice what passed around you?"

"The letter!" I said eagerly, rising from my position, "what letter?"

"The only time Ada spoke to me of you after your departure was when we said good-bye to one another. I expressed my belief that the newspaper reports were incorrect, and a hope that some day things might yet be set straight between you, but she stopped me at once: 'That can never be, Mrs Talbot,' she said; 'if your brother remained unmarried till his dying day, it could make no difference to me, for he has placed an impassable gulph between us.' I pressed her for the meaning of her words, and at last she told me that, swallowing her pride, she had sent a letter after you to Southampton, praying you to be friends again; but that, though she was certain it was placed in your hands, she never received an answer. Now, how was that?"

"Whoever told her I received it, *lied!*" I exclaimed, trembling with excitement; "*did* she write to me, my beloved one? God bless her for it! Oh! Emmeline, what have I done? I wish that I were dead!" And losing all my fortitude, I covered my face with my hands, and the tears trickled through my fingers.

"Hush, Gerald, hush!" said my sister, soothingly; "remember, poor boy, you are married!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A CRISIS.

My parting with Emmeline was not signalised by any of the defiant words which I had thrown in the face of my other sisters. I could not speak harshly to her : she was too gentle and too loving ; I could not even say that I would not visit her again, her affection was so precious to me.

But I showed her the necessity of our intimacy being in a great measure lessened by her husband's decision, in which she mournfully acquiesced ; and then I crept away from her presence considerably humbler than when I sought it, and with spirits tolerably broken, as I reflected on the episode I had just learned of the letter which had followed me to Southampton, and the chance I had thrown away for ever.

When I reached my home I sat down to consider seriously what should be my future line of conduct.

I knew the worst now : the woman I had made my wife would never be recognised as a near connexion by my family, and if I were to do my duty by her, I should be virtually separated from them also. The idea was not tasteful to me ; I thought of the hospitality I had experienced at the hands of Lord and Lady Portsdowne ; of the liberty I had enjoyed in the houses of the Claremonts and Lyndons ; of the sweet fellowship I had had with Emmeline and Marguerite ; and I felt that to relinquish all these advantages would be hard to bear with equanimity.

I had been vain of my advantages also ; used to pique myself on the standing of my acquaintance, and the readiness with which I was welcomed amongst them ; now, I should dread to meet any of my old friends for fear of the reception I might encounter, since I had committed that worst of offences against the social decalogue—a *mésalliance*.

Refused help in my extremity by my nearest of kin, I knew it would be no use hoping to receive it from my more distant relations. The shadow which reflected from the quarrels of

my father and mother had overcast my life, seemed to grow bigger now than heretofore, as I remembered how alienated I had been from my birth from all those who might have aided me. To my uncles and aunts I was nothing, or at best a young man spoilt by indulgence and a desultory moral education, who, on the strength of having a little money, wished to make himself out superior to the rest of his cousins; and to their children I had ever been an object of jealous envy, with which no kindlier feeling can exist. I knew that I need expect no mercy at their hands, and the knowledge begot the resolution never to ask it. In the first shock of learning the view taken of my marriage by my mother and sisters, I had thought of going abroad again; of taking Julia far away from England, and beginning a new life with her where none should know that we had ever been other than we were; but I soon abandoned the idea. Those who were against me should not say that I was cowardly flying from the consequences of my rashness: I had made my bed—I should lie in it.

But I could not contemplate taking up a residence at Grasslands with any degree of satisfaction. I could not bear the thought of settling down with Julia in those familiar rooms, each one of which was haunted by the memory of my father, and where the consideration of what he would have said to the life companion I had chosen would have been ever before me: of wandering again through the plantations and covers where I had first had the misfortune to meet herself; or lingering at dusk beside the bed on which *he* died, and recalling his last words, "I leave you my name—don't soil it." Was it entirely a false shame which made me shrink from the idea of reigning there with her in unsociable splendour, monarchs of all we surveyed, but—cut by the county families? Whether or not, I was not brave enough to face it.

I determined that my heritage, since the Talbots refused to reinstate themselves there, must remain, at least for the present, under the care of a bailiff, and rest contented with an occasional visit of inspection from myself whilst we continued to occupy the house in Brook Street.

There were other reasons besides the ones given to make such a plan desirable. I had already had three months' experience of what life was like, spent in seclusion with my wife, and I did not think it possible that any man could stand it

much longer. I am a gregarious animal : solitude has ever been distasteful to me ; but the most lonely lot is preferable to passing all one's time in the society of an uneducated and unintellectual person.

I do not wish to be unjust : outwardly Julia had been bountifully endowed by nature, and it is seldom that great physical and mental gifts are found united ; but she certainly was not an interesting companion. I felt that by keeping her in London I should not only enjoy the advantage of retaining friends of my own sex, but should be able to render her life less solitary, by substituting public amusements (of which she was inordinately fond) for the private ones to which she bid fair to be denied access.

Having settled this matter, I tried hard to rouse myself, and shake off the melancholy feelings which oppressed me. None of Lord Portsdowne's family were in town, for which I was thankful ; but I looked up plenty of bachelor friends, and was soon launched into as gay a course of living as the season of the year would permit.

But I was not suffered easily to forget the crime I had committed. No sooner had the news of my return had time to be blazoned abroad, than there poured in upon me that storm of anonymous letters which had power to sting me so acutely, and all the deeper, because whilst assured to whom I owed the annoyance I was impotent to punish the offenders. I have always regarded anonymous communications as unworthy a thought ; yet however we may despise the writers, and resentfully destroy the records of their cowardice, should they have been penned with the intent to raise our suspicions, it is difficult, after receiving them, to be as trustful as before. Little hints will remain with us, to open our eyes when we would fain keep them closed, to raise a doubt where we would wish to be confident, to poison, in fact, the peace of our whole lives.

And there was so very little peace in mine, they might have left it unmolested.

All this time, in the intervals of my disquietude, I was brooding deeply over the news which Emmeline had conveyed to me relative to my lost love. I could not drive the thought of her relenting letter out of my mind. Hitherto, whenever I had permitted myself to dwell upon the past, I had called

pride to my aid, and made believe that it was indifference. But I could no longer shut my eyes to what I felt.

Under the knowledge that Ada had desired a reconciliation, had even striven for one, everything connected with our unhappy quarrel assumed a different aspect. She was no longer the unjust and heartless woman who had dismissed me so scornfully from her presence ; but my own love, who had loved me so dearly that she could offer to restore me to her confidence before she had had an explanation of the mysterious circumstance which caused our separation ; and although I knew that I had lost her for ever, I burned to be exculpated in her eyes from the fault with which her imagination had charged me. Day after day I pondered over the best means for attaining my object ; night after night I dreamed that the past had been but a dream, and we were reunited. However late I retired to rest, however wearily my head sunk down upon the pillow, as soon as my senses were wrapt in slumber, Ada would return to me ; sometimes gazing mournfully as when I first told her of my boyish passion, and she looked the pity I would not receive ; sometimes tenderly as when, bright angel ! she hung over the banisters on that fatal night, and darted blessings from her eyes upon me ; at others, scornfully, as when the sun of my life went down.

I knew it was wrong of me to dream of her ; I tried every means I could think of to prevent it, but the thought which haunted me when waking, coloured all my sleep, and I believed that I should have no rest until she knew the truth, and acknowledged that, however foolish, I had been true to her until the madness of despair drove me to be otherwise.

I had no intention of seeking her presence : I had no hope of her admitting me to it if I did : I only wished to have the opportunity of clearing myself by letter. Weighing, one day, this ever-recurring question, the idea of asking the assistance of Mrs Rivers suddenly struck me. The next moment I was overtaken by surprise that I had not thought of it long before, and ready to curse my own folly in having been so dull. *If*, instead of rushing down to Southampton like a madman, I had only gone to her at once, told her the dilemma in which my promise to herself had placed me, and entreated her to absolve me from it, would she have had the heart to destroy

her daughter's happiness for the sake of her wish to remain unknown to her?

I felt sure she would not ; something in the remembrance of the mournful, dark eyes which had watched my departure with such interest convinced me of the justice of my decision.

As I thought of it, and the happiness by which it would probably have been followed, my face flushed, and my pulses commenced to quiver as if such happiness was still within my reach.

Bah ! of what was I thinking ?

The reaction left me weary and dispirited, but as anxious to seek another interview with Mrs Rivers as before ; with which intention I walked at once to the house where I had seen her. I meant to ask her to write a letter to her daughter, which should precede mine, and in which there was no necessity she should give her address ; simply a few words to acknowledge herself the donor of the gift which had been productive of so much misery, and the extraction of the promise which had prevented my defending the accusation brought against me. But when I reached the number of Mrs Rivers's house, I saw that the shutters were closed and the windows begrimed with dust, which prepared me for the intelligence that she was out of town. The woman left in charge had no more notion than her genus generally have of where the lady was gone to, or when she would return ; she could not even tell me the name of an agent or any one likely to supply the information ; she had been " put in " by a gentleman, but she didn't " rightly catch " his name ; she was " paid regular " every week, but she had not been told to answer any inquiries. So I turned away from the door, sick at heart, and more disappointed than I had even anticipated. I concluded Mrs Rivers would return some day, as there was no notice that the house was to let, but every day of uncertainty had grown to be an extra pain. As I sauntered homewards I ran up against my uncle Jabez. I had never answered the letter he sent me to Alexandria, but I knew that he must have heard all the particulars of my marriage from his relations, and I expected that he would, at the best, accord me but a surly greeting.

To my amazement, however, he appeared more cordial than I had ever known him before, and informed me that he had just come from my house.

"I would have waited to see you," he added, "but Mrs Estcourt had no idea how long you might be gone, and my time is precious."

"You have been to see my wife?" I said, grasping his hand, and recalling, not without a thrill, another visit which he had paid on my behalf; "thank you, uncle Jabez."

"Yes; why not—why not?" he replied, in his old gruff manner. "You've done a very foolish thing, but you are not the first man who has made a mistake in marriage. You must weather it the best way you can."

"I suppose you know the flattering comments which have been passed upon my behaviour by the rest of the family—my mother and sister included? They refuse even to see my wife."

"Humph! Well, when will you come down and dine with me?"

"Any day, if you will guarantee I shall meet none of your brothers at your table." I then told him of the anonymous letters which I had received, and my suspicions regarding their authorship.

My uncle Jabez made no remark upon the circumstance, but renewed his request that I would fix the day for visiting him at Richmond.

"Come by yourself," he stipulated; "she's well enough, but I never have any women about my place. I don't understand them."

"I think you would like Julia if you knew her," I urged, desirous to increase his interest in my outcast wife. "She is a very gentle girl; not one of your thunder-and-lightning women, but all the better, perhaps, for a permanency."

"Humph! I dare say. I'm no judge. But I can't understand your giving up the other for her."

"Don't speak of that," I exclaimed, almost as abruptly as himself; "will next Thursday suit you?"

"Yes, I shall expect you;" and uncle Jabez left me, and passed on.

Understand it! How was it possible he should understand an act of madness, the meaning of which it rent my own soul to attempt to fathom? Yet the old man's cordiality, the first I had met with from any of his generation, considerably cheered me, and the opinion I had expressed of him to Ada

returned to my mind ; whatever the other members of my family, he was sterling. I knew that his wish to stand by me was born of the knowledge that I stood alone ; and each time I saw him his face appeared to grow less grim, and more like that of the father to whom I had been so attached.

Disappointed in my hope of communicating with Ada through Mrs Rivers, and not daring to take up my pen to address her, I was by-and-by seized with an unconquerable longing to look on her again, and to judge for myself whether what others had told me of her was true. Emmeline and Gertrude had both described her as having mentioned my name with extreme coldness, and having calmly expressed her gratitude for the escape she had had in not marrying me. I, remembering her in her most tender moods, could not believe that, if such was the case, her words had been the true interpreters of her mind. I wanted to see for myself, to read in her face (the task would be an easy one for me) whether she had really cared nothing for the abrupt termination of our love, or whether she had suffered as I had. Not combating this desire, as I confess I should have done, it daily gained upon me, until I generally found, when mounting my horse for a solitary ride, that the force of my inclination caused his head to turn in the direction of Kensington. I never ventured to ride past the house itself, but I was used to linger opposite to it in the gardens by which the road was skirted, and gaze, gaze, at those familiar windows, at which I never now caught the glimpse of a sunny face, or of a graceful figure yielding beneath the burden of a child.

Once, when the brougham was waiting at the door, and I might have had a chance of seeing her, I rode on hastily, and never turned my head. And still she appeared in my rebellious dreams, and still I occasionally lingered near her dwelling-place, longing and yet dreading to encounter her, until three more months had slipped away, and Christmas was close at hand.

The time had passed monotonously enough with me. I had not given up my bachelor habits since my marriage, in so far that I continued to go to bed early in the morning and rise late in the afternoon ; but no amount of straining after pleasure could dissipate the gloom which enveloped me. I might make an attempt at keeping up the old

spirit of mirth and badinage, but any one with the least discernment must have seen that it was a failure.

Whatever I did, or wherever I went, I never forgot that, though the day of my life was far from its meridian, night had already set in. I had seen my cousins the Lascelles, by that time, and although their greeting was as cordial as ever, and they were constantly in Brook Street, the old familiar topic of their home life, with which I had been so conversant, was closed between us, and I felt that there was something missing in our intercourse which would never figure there again. The season of year contributed to make my exiled condition still more apparent. In former times I had never cared much for Christmas gatherings; I had been wont to think the romping which characterises a genuine endeavour to keep the festival in the good old fashion, vulgar, and the formality which distinguishes a modern Christmas dinner-party absurd. But now I sighed over the remembrance of past vulgarities and absurdities for the sake of the union of feeling which they displayed.

My wife and I were looking forward to spending a very quiet Christmas-day. With the exception of one or two stray bachelors, who were hanging about town at the time, and had no other friends to go to, we were to dine alone. Julia did not feel it as I did; she had not been thrust from her former position in society, and made to keenly draw the contrast between what *was* and what *had been*; but with myself it was different.

I could not help wondering how Ada would spend the day which we had looked forward to spending together, or whether she felt, as I did, that henceforward fasts and festivals would be alike to her. As the anniversary of the time approached when peace and goodwill were proclaimed amongst men, my longing to ask her forgiveness for the pain I had caused her—to hear from her own lips that it was mine, hourly increased; yet I was too great a coward to act. Until one morning, about a week before Christmas-day, I took up the Supplement to the “Times,” and read the following notice:—

“On the 17th instant, at Kensington, of diphtheria, William, only son of the late Saville Penryhn, Esq., aged two years and six months.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

DEATH SOFTENS ALL HEARTS.

As soon as that announcement met my eyes, I felt that I must go to her. I did not wait to consider how she would receive me—whether I should be refused admittance altogether, or banished a second time, with indignation, from her presence. I only thought of her alone, in sorrow for her child, in anger against myself ; and if intrusion on her had been the greatest folly I could commit, the worst sin I could contemplate—if it had been the certain signal for my own dissolution, still I must have gone to her ! I allowed myself no opportunity to relinquish my project, no hesitation in executing it. With my usual impulsiveness I ordered my horse at once, rode to Kensington, and having dismounted within a short distance of the house, ordered the groom to wait for my return at a neighbouring livery stable. My heart throbbed violently as I walked up to the street door ; how sad the little place looked, with all the blinds drawn down ! how different from when I left it, with its miniature balconies filled with gay flowers ! I would not knock for fear of startling her. I rang the bell softly : the face of the servant who answered it was decorously subdued. She started when she saw me, for she was an old friend of mine, and had received many a coin from my hands in the days of my happy wooing—but she did not smile.

“ Mrs Penryhn cannot see any one, sir.”

“ Is she alone ? ” I asked, abruptly.

“ Yes, sir—but poor Master Willie—perhaps you’ve heard ”——

“ I *must* see your mistress,” I said, passing her in the narrow passage, and setting my feet upon the staircase.

“ But sir, if you please,” exclaimed the servant, following me, “ it is impossible. Mrs Penryhn gave orders ”——

What more she said I never ascertained, for I was at the drawing-room door before she had completed her sentence.

The woman might have spared her eloquence ; I felt as if a regiment of dragoons could not have stopped me then. Setting my feet once more within those familiar precincts was, to me, what tasting blood is to the tiger : I had had too little, or too much : I must complete my satisfaction if I died. I threw open the door ; the room was deserted, and I dared not venture higher without permission.

"Ada ! Ada !" I cried, in my longing and despair.

At the sound, a door above opened quickly, and a fluttering voice answered me over the banisters—

"Gerald !"

"I am here," I exclaimed, springing up the stairs, and encountering her upon the upper landing.

"And why ?" she uttered, faintly, staring at me with great sad eyes. "Have you come to increase my misery ? I thought you and I had parted for ever."

I could not answer her : she looked so pale and sorrowful ; there were such lines about her face, such a falling-off in the rounded beauty of her figure, that I forgot everything but that she had been my own, and I had brought her to this, and, darting forward, I strained her to my heart. In the first moment she was passive—in the second she had indignantly struggled herself free.

"Mr Estcourt, you are insulting me ! how dare you ? Neither by our parting nor this meeting are you authorised to touch me," and she drew herself proudly backwards.

I had remembered myself before she spoke, and already stood abashed before her, conscious of my transgression.

"Oh, Ada ! forgive me," I pleaded, earnestly, "I didn't intend it. I had forgotten. I know I have not even the right to be here, still less to address you ; but I have only come to try to lessen my own misery by asking your forgiveness for—for—*all*."

Perhaps the humility of my tone softened her pride, or more likely the depth of wretchedness expressed in my voice touched the heart which, notwithstanding all my unworthiness, had not ceased to love me, for she did not again rebuke my boldness. I did not dare look at her, but we stood silent on the landing for a few minutes, and then she said softly—

"This is not the time for me to say I will not forgive—look here."

She moved gently into the room whence she had issued, and I followed her mechanically. There, on the bed, lay the body of poor little Willie, looking strangely lengthened to my eyes, so unaccustomed to the appearance of death.

The little marble hands, filled with flowers, were crossed upon the innocent breast ; the eyes, which I had last seen so full of childish glee, were closed and sunken ; the baby nose was pinched and elongated : and violet hues already surrounded the fallen mouth. I could scarcely recognise in this aged, unearthly-looking form, the blooming laughing child from whom I had so lately parted ; and I thought it was the saddest sight I had ever witnessed.

As I stood by Ada's side, watching the despairing eyes and quivering lips with which she contemplated the little body, all my sinful objections to the existence of this innocent creature, who had contributed so much to her happiness, rushed back upon my memory, and made me feel as though I were a *murderer*. How I had pleased myself with the idea that there was a chance of his not attaining manhood ; how I had hated the thought of his sharing his mother's affection, or holding a higher place in her heart than my children might do ! And now—it is not too much to say that I would gladly have laid down my wasted unprofitable life to recall that of the only comfort my poor Ada had possessed.

I longed to console her, but I dared not attempt it. I felt myself so utterly unworthy. For a length of time we stood together and watched that lifeless baby, our thoughts meanwhile straying, God only knows where, whilst a mysterious silence enwrapped us, which it seemed sacrilege to break. Yet I was the first to do so.

"I wish I was with him," I muttered.

"So do I," she faintly answered.

The spell was broken, then, and I took heart to proceed.

"Ada ! for God's sake speak, if it be only to curse me, as I curse myself. Or in the presence of this angel, tell me that, whatever my follies, I have your forgiveness for them : that if I have lost your love, it has not been replaced by your hatred."

I caught her listless hand as I spoke, but she withdrew it, and turning her woful face, looked at me as the angels of God may look upon the despairing ones of earth.

"I *have* hated you," she said ; " but it is past now, and there lies my punishment. I *do* forgive you, as I hope to meet my child in heaven."

She dragged herself, rather than walked, across the room, to a large wardrobe with folding doors, whence she drew some article, and regaining the bedside, opened her hands, and disclosed the fragmentary remains of the little horse and Noah's ark which I had purchased for the boy on her birthday—on the day she had promised to become my wife.

" You were always good to *him*," she murmured, looking at me wearily, whilst, though at her words my guilty conscience stung me afresh, I remembered with a thrill of pleasure that on that day at least I had had none but kindly thoughts for the dead innocent before me. There was something in the resurrection of that maimed horse and shattered Noah's ark which stirred us both deeply, for as she continued to gaze at them the tears which I had not seen her shed before rose to her eyes, and dropped faster and faster upon the broken play-things. The sight drove me nearly frantic.

" Ada—dearest, beloved !" I exclaimed, " for God's sake don't cry ! He is better where he is. He might have lived to become what I am, unworthy of a woman's love. Reproach me, Ada. I deserve worse than your reproaches ; tell me to leave you ; say I am not fit to be in the same room with you and *this* ; not fit to touch your hand or meet your eyes : say the cruellest things that you can think of ; but pray—pray—don't cry."

But the now useless toys had touched a chord in the poor mother's heart which all my eloquence could not repair. Her forced calmness gave way, and in a storm of overwhelming grief she threw herself by the side of the little corpse.

" Oh, baby, baby ! why did *you* leave me !" she gasped, hysterically. " I loved you ; why did you go ? You were all I had ; all that was left me, and now I have nothing—*nothing*."

Despair was so manifest in her words that for a moment it was hard to restrain myself from encircling her with my arms, and swearing that she was all the world to me, as I was hers, and never had been otherwise. But I had the courage to stand by passively, and watch in silence until the violence of her emotion should be past. I knew her of old, and that she had

sufficient nerve to calm herself as soon as she should remember what she was about. My confidence was not misplaced : in another minute Ada had risen from her position, and dried her streaming eyes.

"I have been wrong," she said. "I did not think I had so little control over myself, but you know that he was dear to me. Come. Let us leave this room ; I am here too much as it is. I shall be better able to hear what you may have to say to me in another."

She passed the threshold as she spoke, and led the way into an adjoining boudoir. There, without looking at me, she sank into a seat and bowed her head upon her hand. She placed herself in the attitude of one who, having agreed to admit a defence, is only waiting to hear what the penitent has to say for himself ; and reading her thoughts aright I prepared to open my plea. But the task appeared more difficult in the boudoir than in the bedroom. There, taken by surprise at my appearance and in the presence of her dead child, Ada had betrayed more of her natural feelings than I felt she cared to remember now.

Much of the resentment, whether feigned or real, she would under ordinary circumstances have manifested towards me, had been washed out by the softening influences of her grief ; but now that we were quietly sitting side by side, and the memory of all that had happened since our last interview returned to her, the weary look in her eyes gave place to her sense of injury, and she kept her face haughtily averted.

"Ada," I commenced, after a while ; but she held up her hand.

"Stay a moment, Mr Estcourt. Before we speak together it is as well that I should remind you of one thing. I conclude you have come here to-day with some idea of making excuses to me for your late conduct. But remember that I have not asked for them ; that, so far as you know, I have not even wished for them. I am willing to listen to anything you may have to say on the subject, particularly if the saying it will give you any comfort ; but you must be good enough, when you address me, to recollect that we are nothing to each other now, and that if you had not taken me at a disadvantage, it is probable that this meeting would never have been."

"But it would have been," I exclaimed, eagerly. "Had you refused me admittance to your presence I would have waylaid you in the street; I would have hung about your doorstep; I would have haunted you until I gained the opportunity I have thirsted for to explain myself. That object accomplished, I will never annoy you again, but I cannot rest until it is done. I owe it to myself and to you; to the memory of that past which I can never forget, although I will try to remember that we are—as you say—*nothing* to each other now."

I wheeled my chair away from hers as I spoke, in mute significance that she had nothing further to dread from me. As the last phrase left my lips I saw her eyelids shudderingly close and then reopen, but she did not look offended at the assurance of my intended pertinacity. The silence of a few moments followed my speech, and then I resumed hurriedly:—

"However hard I try to comply with your wishes, you can scarcely expect me to speak to you as if we had never been more than mere friends. Ada, it is impossible. During the three months that I have been in England I have been thinking over every possible means to exculpate myself in your sight without compromising my honour; and had I been able to discover any, you would have heard of or from me before this. But now I must do the best for myself that I can; you shall at all events know all that I dare tell you.

"As I was walking home from this house on the evening of the second of July I was met by a woman, who told me that she had something of importance to say to me. I begged her to inform me of her business in the street, but she refused to do so unless I accompanied her to her residence. She had excited my curiosity to that degree that I went home with her. (you see, Ada, that I conceal nothing from you,) and on my arrival there her news certainly justified the interest she had aroused, but she did not make me master of it until she had extracted a solemn promise that I would inform no one of her name, place of abode, or even existence. I blindly gave her my word, little dreaming to what my rashness would lead; and to remind me of the obligation, (for so she said,) she placed at parting that ring upon my finger which was the cause of all our wretched misunderstanding; and I would that she had been"—

"*Hush, hush!*" said Ada, in a voice unnaturally subdued. I glanced towards her; her face had become lividly pale; I thought she was fainting, and left my seat; but she motioned me from her, and sat silent as before, but with her hand tightly pressed over the region of her heart.

"Can you believe my story?" I continued. "I am unable to tell you more. Two months ago I went to that woman's house to see if she would release me from my promise; but she is gone, and I cannot ascertain where. I am still bound in honour not to reveal her identity, nor the purport of her communication to me; but as there is a God, I have told you the truth. Nothing more passed between the giver of that ring and myself than what you now know. It was not even a token of friendship.

"I was not false to you, Ada," I went on, finding that she gave me no answer, "in thought, word, or deed. I never have been. I never shall be. I know that I must no longer tell you what I feel for you, but my heart is unchanged."

She made an attempt to answer me, but failed.

"Up to the date of our parting I have nothing to reproach myself with as far as faith to yourself is concerned. For what has taken place since, oh, Ada! you may safely leave me to the reproaches of my own conscience."

"Why—why—did you—not tell me—this before?" she ejaculated, with parched lips.

"Because you were too angry, Ada; we were both too angry; we lost our tempers, and were in no fit state to give or receive explanations which involved a sacrifice of pride."

"I know it, I know it!" she exclaimed. "God forgive me, I knew it directly afterwards; but you cherished the ill-feeling longer than I did. My letter, Gerald—the one that followed you to Southampton; were you too angry even to answer that?"

"I never received it!" I exclaimed passionately; "I told Emmeline so. Where did you address me, Ada? I could have shed tears of blood to think that I had missed that letter."

She looked at me incredulously.

"Never received it? but he put it in your hands."

"Who put it in my hands?"

"Your cousin, Mr Logan—he told me so—he took my letter to Southampton himself, because I did not know where to address you."

As I heard this, the hot blood surged through my veins, and starting from my chair I looked her earnestly in the face—

"He *told* you so? he said he had delivered your letter to me? Then he is the most confounded liar that ever walked this earth! I never spoke to him, I never saw him but for an instant. Oh! *curse* him, *curse* him, *curse* him," I continued, grinding my teeth, and stamping my foot with the expression of each oath, as I reflected on what this man's falsehood had cost us. Ada, frightened at my vehemence, and overcome perhaps by the same idea, sat gazing at me with trembling, parted lips.

"Tell me everything," I said next, "tell me why you employed that man as your messenger—what made you think of him—what account did he give of himself: tell me all, that I may know how to deal with him when we meet again."

She did not stay to rebuke my intent or to lay any cautions on my rashness. She was as eager to tell me as I was to learn.

"The morning after we parted, Gerald, I was sitting by myself, and wondering if that day's sun would go down on our wrath, when your cousin was announced, and told me at once that you had gone to Southampton, *en route* for the East. The news took me so completely by surprise that I forgot everything but my desire for our reconciliation; and since he had always been very friendly with me, I confessed to him that there had been a misunderstanding between us, and asked him where I should direct a letter to you. There was no time to spare, and I knew of no one better to apply to. He said he was ignorant, with all your family, of your exact address, but that if I would write the letter he would take it to Southampton himself and deliver it into your hands. I trusted him, of course. I was too thankful to have him to trust, and he took charge of my letter, and told me that you had received it, but—but—from what he knew and had seen he was not surprised to hear that I had received no answer."

"The scoundrel!" I muttered, with fixed teeth, "the

villain ! by heaven, he shall pay for this. And after my departure, Ada, did he come much to your house ?”

“He did at first. I thought he had tried to do me a service, and being grateful to him for it, did not like to be cool to him, until—until”——

“Until what ?” I demanded fiercely, half guessing the upshot of Mr Logan’s attentions.

“Until—(you will not let it go farther, Gerald, but the time is past for concealments between us)—until he proposed marriage to me, and I was compelled to forbid him the house.”

I was too indignant to comment upon her news ; I walked up and down the room, quivering with passion, and inwardly registering the oaths to which I dared not give vent. This, then, had been the end and aim of his offers of friendship ; this the ulterior object of his ready acquiescence in her wishes ; to prevent instead of furthering a reconciliation between us ; to secure my treasure for himself. I could not doubt that he had delayed delivering that letter on purpose ; else why had he not written to me on the subject or mentioned it since my return ? But he should pay for it ; it was not in him to insult me with impunity. I swore by all that was sacred that he should rue his work. I remembered his coarse admiration of my love at Freshwave, and the summary check I had put to it : and connecting that circumstance with the undisguised satisfaction which he had evinced at my unfortunate marriage, felt that if he had failed in securing his own happiness by winning Ada, he had doubly succeeded in his intention to make me wretched.

“Ada !” I said presently, and I was surprised at the calmness with which I was able to speak, “we have been grossly and intentionally deceived, and Mr Logan shall find that in me he has no woman to deal with. No disgrace, however, that I can inflict upon him can undo the past or restore our happiness. We are the victims of our own hastiness and a bad man’s malice. But that has little to do with my later folly, although you will believe me when I say, that had your letter reached me, that folly would never have been committed. But it is over now, and not to be undone ; yet if you will kindly listen to me a little longer, I should like to tell you how it was that my marriage came about.”

I saw her shrink from me as the word "marriage" left my lips, but she gently inclined her head, and I interpreted the action as a permission to proceed.

I premised by reminding her that when we became engaged to one another, I offered to put her in possession of the facts of my former life, and that she had declined to receive my confidence. She acquiesced in this; "Because I trusted you," she added with a touch of renewed bitterness.

"And you had no need then to do otherwise," I rejoined fervently; and going on in a burst of feeling, I told her everything as I had told it to Emmeline. She heard me throughout, patiently and in silence; but as soon as I had concluded my unhappy narration she put to me the following question:

"You say that you had no communication with Mr Logan whilst at Southampton. How then did he come to know that—that the lady who is now Mrs Estcourt was on board with you? He spread the report immediately on his return."

I had often pondered over the mystery connected with the intimate knowledge which my family displayed of my affairs, and the doubt expressed by its various members when I had tried to slur over the fact of my marriage not having taken place until I had arrived at Alexandria; but now it was no longer a mystery. The same hand which had aided to destroy my happiness had done its best to destroy my respectability also, and the woman-wit of Ada had helped her at the first glance to a conclusion which the study of months had not unravelled for my duller self. How could Tom Logan have known it? When I had caught that last fleeting glimpse of his ugly face as the steamer left the Southampton quay, Julia was down below in the cabin, nor had she appeared on deck until we were out of sight of land. It had never struck me to put any questions to her on this subject, not knowing the necessity for them; but now I burned to reach Brook Street again and make her confess everything she knew.

"I cannot tell you, Ada," I said, in answer to her inquiry, "but I shall not rest until I have ascertained. And now, perhaps, I had better leave you. This is not the time to worry you with my troubles; I have told you all that I can. Will you renew your promise of forgiveness? The knowledge of it is the only peace I look for."

I approached her as I spoke, and she rose from her seat, and put her hand in mine. The interview had been very bitter to both of us : but this formal leave-taking was the bitterest part of it. It made us feel so plainly that, whatever our hearts said, all expression of our love was thenceforth forbidden ; that outwardly we were indeed to be *nothing* to each other now. Yet, though she did not speak to me, her hand closed firmly over mine, and I knew that nothing parted us but misery.

"God bless you," I said, falteringly ; "you have less to regret in this shipwreck of our mutual hopes than I have. You will be the first to regain your happiness. I pray it may be so."

She shook her head, and two large tears rose to her eyes, but did not fall.

"I shall go away," she answered, quietly, "when—when the—funeral is over."

"Not for good?" I exclaimed, eagerly. "Ada, say I am not to lose you altogether—that I may sometimes see your face and hear your voice ; the only comfort left to me will be to think that you are still my friend."

An ordinary woman, loving me as this woman did, would probably have broken down at such a speech, and wept her heart out in my arms. But Ada Penryhn was not an ordinary woman ; she was a heroine who could hide her own feelings, or if not hide, forbid their outlet, when indulgence of them would do another harm. But my words had shaken her self-control, and the answer she felt it right to make me was given on compulsion, for her lips grew white as she proceeded, and her voice, though firm, sunk almost to a whisper ; still she did not hesitate, although her sentences were broken.

"I shall always be your friend, in the best meaning of the word—so long as you keep within the bounds of friendship. But you must not call me Ada, nor speak of the time when we were—anything to one another—nor must you come here—without your wife."

"Then I shall never come at all," I answered quickly ; "my wife is an outcast whom my own family refuse to shake hands with, therefore I can have no expectation of my friends receiving her. We have been settled in Brook Street now for three months, and not a lady of my acquaintance has called

upon us, nor a man either who has a wife or daughter to be polluted. For all the respectable company we see, I might have dispensed with that tardy wedding-ring altogether." And forgetting what lay in the next room to me, I laughed in my despair.

"Is it possible?" she said, sadly; "I am very sorry—oh! I am very sorry indeed to hear it. Poor girl! how she must feel it. I am *so* sorry for her. I hope it may not continue. Perhaps your people will come round by-and-by. Has not even Mrs Talbot called upon her?"

"Not even Mrs Talbot," I echoed, carelessly; "and the best of it is, that I find myself sent to Coventry into the bargain. Of course I cannot go where Julia is not admitted, consequently we get pretty well tired of one another's company. You see I was not entirely unselfish in asking for the continuance of your friendship; for I shall become perfectly barbarous in a short time if you are not good enough to admit me occasionally to your society."

She did not reply: the tone of badinage I had adopted appeared to jar too painfully upon her feelings.

"You shall hear from me when I return," she said, in a low voice. "I *must* go away first."

I passed on to the landing, anterior to bidding her farewell. She followed me lingeringly.

"May I go in there again?" I said, motioning towards the room where the dead baby lay. She opened the door at once, and for the second time we stood by all that remained of little Willie, together. The varied and tumultuous feelings which we had just experienced appeared to retire in the distance and lose their power in the sacred presence of death. Even the gulf which divided us was bridged over by the remembrance of our love.

"Good-bye, baby," I said, bending down to kiss the cold forehead. "Let your angel comfort your mother and pray for me."

I had not anticipated the effect of my simple words.

"Gerald!" cried Ada, seizing my hand, "*I* will pray for you. Night and morning will I pray, as I have ever done, that your life may be useful and happy. Do you think that my heart is made of stone; that because I am wretched I have forgotten; that misery and love cannot go together?

Believe me, I take half the blame to myself. I bear you no more malice than that angel did."

Her eyes uplifted to mine, were streaming with tears; her hands were clasped as if in supplication. Involuntarily I caught her in my arms, and for one instant we forgot that we were *nothing to each other*.

"It is for the last time," she said, quietly, as I released her. "Take it, Gerald, as the token of my complete forgiveness, and Ada's farewell; for from this day I must be to you only—your friend Mrs Penryhn. And I trust you not to come here again until you hear from me." So saying, she gently closed the bedroom door upon me, and hearing the key turn in the lock, I left her, with her dead child and the memory of her dead happiness to bear her company, and sought the street.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SATISFACTION.

I WAS so excited after this interview that I had walked half the way to Brook Street before I remembered that my horse and groom were waiting for me at the livery stables. But I was too eager to reach home to think of retracing my footsteps; I left the man's instinct to guide him, in due course, back again. That question, so closely connected with the truth or falsehood of my wife, which Ada upon hearing the story of my marriage had propounded to me—"How did Thomas Logan know that Julia was on board the steamer?"—had been turned over and over in my mind as I walked rapidly along; and each time it occurred to me, the answer suggested by my fears was more unsatisfactory than before. I had examined Julia so strictly with respect to her intimacy with my cousin; I had addressed so many searching inquiries to her, almost putting her on oath for the veracity of her replies, that I felt, if indeed there had been any collusion between them with regard to her following me to Alexandria,

that I should never be able to trust her again. And, at that time, I had not lost all hope of her becoming, at some future period, companionable to me, even perhaps necessary, for she was young, and should have been ductile. But if she was false and designing, all chance of comfort was over for both of us. I walked so quickly that on reaching my own door I was out of breath, but I could think of nothing but my determination to learn the whole truth from her lips. The afternoon had closed in, and as I entered the drawing-room where Julia was sitting, it had become too dark for me to see her face.

"What are you sitting in the dusk for?" I said, abruptly. "Have the gas lighted."

She rose to ring the bell, but I deterred her.

"I don't wish the servants here; I will light it myself."

Something in my voice or manner must have struck her as unusual, for as the gas flared up, she asked me timidly if anything was the matter.

"Nothing, I hope," I replied, as, having accomplished my object, I turned and confronted her; "but I have a question to put to you that will not wait."

"What question, Gerald?" and her eyes moved from beneath my gaze uneasily.

"Only this, and be careful how you answer me. You remember, probably, the day on which you followed me to Southampton? Now, Julia, I want to know distinctly *who* told you that I had gone there."

"I told you at the time, Gerald, that I had met Saunders."

"But Saunders was with me."

"Oh, so he was. Then it must have been one of the other servants."

"Excuse me, Julia, but your first account was that you had called at this house to inquire after me."

"Oh, so I did," she hurriedly replied, but her heightened colour did not escape my notice; "I called here, and James told me that you had gone."

"You are quite sure this is the case?"

"Of course I am," she said, pouting; "do you suspect me of telling a story about it?"

"Then you will have no objection to my ascertaining if James can corroborate your statement, provided that I do not divulge my motive for the question?"

At this proposal my wife turned very red, and commenced to whimper.

"May I ring for him, Julia? I assure you I have sufficient tact to make him mention the circumstance without in the slightest degree compromising yourself."

She returned me no answer, but burst out crying. Then I said, sternly—

"If you have spoken truth, what cause have you for tears? If you are trying to deceive me, I advise you to rectify the mistake at once, for I am resolved to know all the circumstances attending your following me to Southampton before you go to bed this night."

Thus apostrophised, my wife dried her eyes and assured me she would tell everything if I promised not to be angry with her, for which I readily passed my word. Disgusted I might be, but not enraged; she was too cowardly and insignificant a thing for a man to spend his wrath upon; besides I did not care for her sufficiently to excite myself upon the subject. At her best or worst, Julia would never have been more than the tool of another.

So then she confessed, in a shaking voice, which only bred my contempt, that she had not met or seen any of my servants on the day in question, but had received a visit from Mr Logan, who had informed her of my departure.

"He only just mentioned it, Gerald; and very naturally. How could he know that I should act upon his information?"

"At what o'clock did he call on you?" I asked, taking no notice of her wish to justify Logan's actions.

"Oh, not till twelve or two."

"And you started by the three o'clock train? You are forgetting yourself, Julia; think again."

"Well; perhaps it was about ten o'clock he came."

"Was it he who proposed your following me?"

"Why, Gerald?" in a tone of injured affection: "of course I wanted to go with you."

"Was it Thomas Logan, Julia, who proposed your journeying to Southampton after me?"

"I think he *was* the first to speak about it."

"Did he accompany you there?"

"I'm sure I don't know why you're putting all these questions to me, Gerald," she exclaimed, relapsing into tears;

"I think you are very unkind to worry me about things that I have half forgotten."

"I have my reasons, therefore you must try to remember them," I returned, in a voice of command. "Did he go with you in the train?"

"Yes," she uttered faintly.

"Did he inquire at what hotel I was staying for you?"

"Yes," in the same frightened tone; "but you *promised* not to be angry with me, Gerald. How could I have gone all that way by myself."

"I am not angry," I returned contemptuously. "Why are you trembling so? you need not fear that I shall hurt you. Whatever your duplicity towards me may have been, you are a woman, and I your husband. Now, answer my last question. Did Thomas Logan, when proposing the step you followed, hint by word or look that if you played your cards well such a plan might end in my marrying you?"

"He said (remember, Gerald, you promised) that I should be a fool if I didn't persuade you to do so."

"Then it *was* a foul plot between you!" I exclaimed, almost forgetting my promise in my rage. "Say at once that this devil's trick was hatched by you and him, solely to bring about our wretched union. And you could follow me there, and play upon my feelings with your crocodile tears and false protestations of affection, knowing all the time that you were merely taking advantage of my lonely condition and indifference to all things, to compass your own mercenary ends? Julia, my marriage with you has ruined every prospect I had in life; but yet, had you loved me, I believe I should have come, some day, to be glad that I had made you such restitution for the past as was in my power; but your confession of this evening has destroyed all chance of happiness for either of us. I never put much trust in your capacity for loving, but I thought you were better than your own words make you out to be, or I would have killed myself before I had given you the honourable name my mother bears. Oh, leave me!" I continued, as she attempted to caress me; "don't make me repent the promise I have given; you are beneath my anger, but I don't want to hate you if I can help it; leave me to myself until the freshness of my contempt has died out. As for *him*, no earthly power shall

shield him from my vengeance. If I could sever his carcase limb from limb, tear his lying tongue from his mouth, and desecrate his mangled remains, my thirst for revenge would not be slaked. As it is, all that I can do to expose his falsehood and make his name execrated shall be done, and speedily. Meanwhile, my orders to yourself are, *never to speak to him again*. The day I find that you have disregarded my command, under whatever circumstances, sees you and me separated for ever."

And yet, although I spoke so angrily that she crept out of my presence like a chidden child, the vials of my wrath were not reserved for her. Loving me or not, she was scarcely to be blamed for wishing to attain the position of my wife, or following the counsel which had pointed out the favourable opportunity, and told her to take advantage of it. She knew so little of my affairs at that time that she could not have foreseen, as her adviser must have done, that the mere fact of her accompanying me was sufficient to ruin all chance of a reconciliation between myself and Ada Penryhn, being an affront that, under ordinary circumstances, no man would dare to offer, or woman deign to forgive. But had she been aware of this, and intended it to take place, she was, after all, but a female, and my vanity pleaded that it was excusable in her to wish to reinstate herself in my good graces. What made me despise her were the means by which she had attained her end; that I had suffered her to attain it I was answerable for myself. But when I thought of him who had devised this plan for my destruction, and remembered how often he had sat in my rooms since my return, repeating with gusto the unflattering comments which he had heard passed upon my conduct, and inwardly triumphing (as now I felt he must have triumphed) as he marked the discomfiture which, on hearing his repetitions, I could not always conceal, I panted for my revenge. There was no rest for me that evening; and half an hour after my trembling wife had left me, I seized my hat and went forth in search of George Lascelles. I had no trouble in finding him, as he and his brother were both in town. In a few words I told them my story, and asked them if they would accompany me the next morning to Logan's place in the city.

"I only wish to have an explanation from him," I said, as

carelessly as I could, "and shall be glad of your presence on the occasion, lest he should spread a false report of the proceedings. You will have no objection, I presume?"

"None whatever, my dear fellow," said George Lascelles, "only too glad to do you a service; but I fancy there must be some mistake in the matter. I cannot imagine any man to be such a scoundrel!"

"I shall be perfectly *charmed* to make one of the party," exclaimed Jack, showing all his teeth, and chuckling over the idea of a row. "I only wish I had to tackle another of the brothers. I hate those Logans. Come, Jerry, don't look so forlorn; it will all blow over some day; in the meanwhile you may depend on us: we'll stick by you, old fellow, and be ready at any time you like to name—won't we, George?"

George acquiesced as heartily as before, and together they did their best to raise my spirits and make me shake off the mountain of despondency which oppressed me; but it was a difficult matter to fall in with their kind-hearted design. Their whole idea appeared to be that I was suffering under the knowledge of my ill-assorted marriage; they forgot, or could not realise, that the loss of my love was greater to me than all other miseries put together. However, I did my utmost to repay their efforts, and to all outward appearance we had an hilarious evening. Jack especially, who could not resist at every turn jesting about our prospective interview with the Logans, was more than friendly each time that he observed the slightest fall in my spirits. As I encountered his bright glance, or received his well-meant attempts at consolation, I could not help thinking of the time when we had been all in all to one another, and had gone far towards swearing abstinence from woman's love for the sake of our mutual affection. How much better it would have been for me could such an oath have been registered and kept! I had so little to show for the abandonment of that youthful resolution, and having tasted the forbidden fruit, it was impossible to return to my first affection with the same freshness as before.

Dear *Fidus Achates*! may you never through life miss the friendship you have lavished upon me; and which if less glowing than our boyish attachment, has proved its power to survive both time and tempest!

I did not leave them until late, having named eleven o'clock

the next morning for our pilgrimage into the City. Jack grumbled at the earliness of the hour ; but I had my own reasons for wishing to go at that time, and notwithstanding his objections, he was as punctual as his brother in keeping the appointment. A sleepless night had not improved my spirits, although it had strengthened my resolution, and my cousins had the conversation chiefly to themselves, I staring out of the carriage windows meanwhile, and grasping the light cane which I held in my hand. The offices of Logan and Son were situated in Bishopsgate Street Within, and we had a long drive before we reached them. Yet so deeply were my thoughts engaged, that when we stopped at the door it seemed to me as though we had not been five minutes on the way. I had never been into the blank, dreary-looking building before ; and as, followed by my friends, I entered the lower offices there was a general look of surprise on the faces of the half-dozen clerks who were engaged therein, as if they wondered what business we could possibly have to transact with their employer.

"Is Mr Thomas Logan within ?" I said, with a motion of my head towards an apartment separated from the one in which we stood by a door in ground-glass windows.

"Mr Logan, sir, or Mr Thomas ?" inquired a dapper little man, descending from his desk to put the question to me.

"The junior partner," I returned. "Tell him that I wish to speak to him."

"Hadn't you better go inside, Estcourt ?" whispered George Lascelles. "So much more private."

"I have no wish for privacy," I answered aloud ; "the more who hear what I have to say to him the better."

At this the young clerks of the establishment visibly pricked up their ears, and the senior clerk, waiting for further instructions, looked discomposed.

"What name, sir ?"

"Mr Estcourt ; and tell Mr Thomas Logan that I desire to speak to him *here*."

The man disappeared behind the door with the ground-glass windows, and probably modified the haughtiness of my message, for in another minute Thomas Logan preceded him into the area where I stood, impatiently tapping the floor with my cane. He was evidently taken aback by the unusual appearance of the Lascelles' and myself, and guessed that our errand

was not of a peaceable nature, for he returned our salutes in an awkward, shuffling manner, rubbing his hands together uneasily the while.

"Oh ! good morning ! good morning !" he said, "I shall be glad to hear your business with me, as my time is rather valuable."

The sight of his freckled face, unsteady glance, and conscious demeanour roused my very worst passions. At that moment he was not so much the man who had planned to force a wife upon me as the scoundrel who had tried by stratagem to secure my Ada for himself. Advancing to where he stood, looking from one to the other for an explanation of our presence, I startled him by thundering in his ear :

"I am the only one who has business with you, Logan, and business to which all other must succumb. Tell me what you did with the letter which you were entrusted to deliver to me at Southampton on the 3d of last July."

"Eh, eh ? what's the matter now ?" he ejaculated ; but his face turned excessively white, and his small eyes roved uneasily upon the various figures that surrounded him.

"The matter, you scoundrel !" I exclaimed, "there'll be matter enough between you and me, if you do not speedily answer my question. What did you do with it ? To whom did you give it ? How dared you report that you had placed it in my hands ?"

"Come, it's of no use your trying to bully me, Estcourt," he rejoined, coarsely ; "there are plenty of us here, and I'll have you put out of the place if you can't be civil."

"Not till you've answered my question," I replied, fiercely. "I'll have an explanation from you of your conduct in that matter, or I'll thrash you like the cur that you are."

"You had better try it," he said, with an attempt at defiance.

"Estcourt, for God's sake don't touch the fellow," urged George Lascelles ; "he isn't worth it."

"Worth it—no ! but for once he shall have more than he deserves. Stand off, Lascelles, don't try to prevent me. This is *my* business, and I will settle it in my own way."

The clerks had all left their desks by this time, and were grouped about us ; some looking half alarmed at the serious turn affairs were taking, others wearing a smile of secret satisfaction on their countenances, as they prepared to witness a

punishment they had doubtless often longed to give their amiable overseer themselves. He, meanwhile, half crouching, craven-like, against the principal desk, had more than once issued the order, which nobody obeyed, to summon his father from the inner room.

"You volunteered to take charge of a letter for me to Southampton last July, and averred afterwards that you had delivered it into my hands. Was that a lie, or was it not?"

"You don't mean to say you didn't get it!" he said, although his teeth were almost chattering with fear. The sarcasm implied in his words forbade any further forbearance. Seizing him by the coat-collar, I elevated my cane, which though slight was strong, and thrashed him like a dog.

"*This* for setting Julia Sherman upon my track," I exclaimed, forgetful of everything but my revenge; "*this* for retaining the letter which was lawfully mine; *this* for the assertions which followed your treachery. Liar! Scoundrel! Cur!"

"Eh! eh! what's this—what's all this?"

The coward had cried for mercy, and with a final cut, which broke the cane in two, I threw him violently from me against the opposite wall, and taking out my handkerchief to wipe the perspiration which, notwithstanding the season, poured down my face, perceived that his father, attracted from his apartment by the unusual noise, was standing amongst us. This man had ever been, as I have had occasion to relate before, coarse and repellant in his manners towards myself, and I was glad he had been witness to his son's disgrace.

"Eh! eh! what is all this about? Sir, (to me,) I demand an explanation from you."

"You had better ask it of him," I said, pointing to the prostrate figure against the wall, "though I shall be proud to oblige you. Your son is a liar, sir, and a coward into the bargain, and my stick was too good a one to break across his back."

I was still panting with the exertion I had gone through, and the Lascelles' appeared to be afraid that I should have a turn with the old man, now I had finished the young one, by the strenuous efforts they made to get me away.

"Come on, Jerry," whispered Jack, tugging at my coat-

sleeve ; "don't begin another row ; they've had enough for to-day."

"Fetch a policeman ! fetch a policeman !" exclaimed Mr Logan, appealing to the whole establishment. "Do you hear what I say, Daws ?" he continued, fixing upon one, "go and fetch a policeman ; I give this gentleman into custody for assault."

The man was proceeding to put his chief's order into execution, when Thomas Logan raised himself from his position and sat against the wall.

"Daws, stay where you are," he said, peremptorily. "Father, don't make a fool of yourself. I'll have no policeman brought in here to add to the confusion. I shall settle matters with this gentleman myself."

"Don't attempt to lay a finger on me," I retorted, in answer to this threat, "or, as you are a living man, I shall murder you. You are none of my blood, thank God ! But if you were, I'd extirpate the whole brood, for a lying cowardly crew that would disgrace any family."

"You care so much for the honour of the family, don't you ?" he sneered ; "you have brought such good blood into it to mingle with the old stock ; you've made such a highly respectable, aristocratic marriage *for the head of the family*, eh ?"

"Coward !" I exclaimed, "when you know that that marriage was brought about by your own intrigue."

"That's true enough," he replied, "and it's the best knowledge I have. How did the names look together in the newspaper, eh ? 'Mr and Mrs Gerald Estcourt.' That trick turned up trumps, didn't it ?"

At this, if my cousins had not forcibly restrained me, I should have flown at him again ; as it was, I found that their combined efforts had drawn me outside the office-door before I had time to do more than curse him to his face as I reiterated the opinion I had of him.

"I'll have you up for this," were the last words I heard him utter, as I made my exit ; "you shall hear from me again, Master Estcourt, before many days are over your head ; you shall find that you can't assault a gentleman with impunity. We'll see if we can't get a few damages out of you for this. You needn't be surprised when you receive the

summons, for it shall be served on you as quickly as the law will permit."

"I shall be very much astonished if he doesn't keep his word," said George Lascelles, as we drove homewards, "for you gave him a regular thrashing, Estcourt, and no mistake. Why, every bone in the fellow's body resounded when you threw him against the wall."

"Serve him right," I answered. "I wish every one of them had broken."

"It was first-rate," exclaimed the Honourable Jack, rubbing his hands; "it was the neatest thing possible. And before all his clerks too. I don't think he'll forget it, Jerry—not in a hurry, that is to say. It was a famous drubbing."

"It was not half what he deserves," I said, setting my teeth at the remembrance of my wrongs. "By heavens! when I think of what that man has made me suffer, I feel as if I must go back again and finish him off altogether."

"Come, Estcourt," said George, soothingly, "you must not go on like this. You have had your satisfaction, and a very tidy one it was; and now the best thing you can do is to dismiss the whole affair from your mind."

"Sooner said than done," I growled; for on reviewing what had passed I felt dissatisfied that I had let the reptile off so easily.

"I wonder how soon they'll serve the summons on you," remarked Jack, who seemed to think that appearing at the Police Court to answer for an assault would be almost better fun than assisting at its committal had been.

"Probably not at all," I answered; "he is like all cowards—barks loud and bites little; and an account of his conduct in the papers would not tend to add to his reputation, private or mercantile. He will let the affair die a natural death, like the white-livered hound that he is. But if he does muster courage to face public inquiry, I shall still consider the settlement I have had with him to-day cheap at the highest price that the law can put upon it."

"I should think so," returned Jack. "By Jove, Jerry! I feel just like the children after a play. I wish it was going to begin, instead of being all over."

"Well, I am glad it is all over, Jack. I shall sleep better now that my conscience is at rest concerning him."

For several days after this occurrence I half expected to receive the summons with which Thomas Logan had threatened me, but it never made its appearance. As I had surmised, he was too great a craven to confront me in the Police Court; and he was as scrupulous to avoid me in private. Many years have passed since these events happened, but I have never shaken hands with him or any of his family since. I do not say that under some circumstances I would refuse to do so, but fortunately it has not fallen to my lot to have to make a decision in the matter, as we have been completely separated. Even as I write, surrounded by every blessing that man can desire, I am thankful to think there is no chance that his forbidding countenance, associated with the unpleasantest recollections of my early life, shall ever intrude upon my domestic happiness. For not long after I had broken my best cane over his shoulders, in Bishopsgate Street Within, he went out to China in some mercantile speculation, settled and married there, and I understand is transmitting his freckled face and sandy hair to posterity with laudable perseverance.

So be it. So long as he never reappears to revive that wretched memory in my breast. In China I can forgive him; in England, I should only burn to kick him over again.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

RETURNING home after my encounter with Thomas Logan, I felt as if there was nothing in the world left for me to do. The interview with Ada Penyrhn, which I had been daily longing for, was past and gone. I had looked upon her face again, received the assurance of her forgiveness, but been warned not to reseek her presence without permission. I had peeped into Eden, but the gate was closed, and I had no present hope of its reopening. Even the thirst for revenge, excited by her revelations, had been too easily quenched; my

visit to the City already appeared like a dream in the retrospect, and yet there was nothing more to be done in that quarter. I had had my satisfaction, although I did not feel satisfied. My hopes had been realised, but left nothing more behind them than the knowledge that they had been.

It was certainly a consolation to find that the report of the punishment I had inflicted on my cousin had been well bruited about the family ; having taken place so publicly, they despaired perhaps of altogether concealing the affair, and would not therefore deny themselves the pleasure of stigmatising my conduct to the rest of my kindred. From whatever reason, however, I am bound to say that their story lost nothing by repetition, and that they gave me full credit for the trouble I had taken, for I might have possessed the transmigrated soul of a Nero or a Caligula to have committed the barbarities of which I was accused. Even my sisters were disposed to believe the family version of the occurrence. Emmeline looked grave when it was related to her ; Beatrice shocked, Gertrude delighted ; and the united eloquence of the Lascelles' and myself was hardly sufficient to persuade any of the three to credit the account which we had to give of the circumstance. Of course, if I had been held in dislike by the various offshoots of the family tree before this period of my life, I was doubly abused by them now. To enter the private office of a gentleman, in broad daylight, and deliberately attempt to murder an inoffensive and promising young man, was an act worthy of a prodigal who had been reared by Lady Mary Estcourt, and then left absurdly independent by a too-indulgent father ; who associated with, and was allied to, the aristocracy, and considered himself better than the rest of his family in consequence. Which of *them*, indeed, had been in the possession of an estate and three thousand a year at the age of two-and-twenty ? which of them, even though they had toiled at the banking desk, or in the merchant's office half their lives, kept thoroughbred horses, and had their garments made by Poole ? Mine was a fit end to a career that had commenced with folly. It was true that I had not yet lost my money ; but I had contracted such a marriage as rendered it next to useless, and they did not despair of some day seeing me bankrupt in fortune as I was bankrupt in heart. Many such unflattering comments reached

me second-hand ; but I had been too much humbled by the change which had lately taken place in my condition to feel more than that I had deserved them. I saw now that I had begun the race with too much confidence ; that I had ridden too hopefully over the waves of life, never giving a thought to the quicksands by which I was surrounded ; that, having power in my outward grasp, and feeling it stir my inward soul, I had imagined the world to be before me, and that I had but to draw upon public opinion for Fame, as I drew upon my bankers for money. I recalled with feelings of inglorious shame how, in my boyish days, I had resolved by the exercise of my talents to set myself as far above Thomas Logan and the rest of my cousins as my father had set himself above his brothers. And what had I done to further my design ? Starting indifferently well, I had thrown aside my pen at the first obstacle which had presented itself in my way ; I had wasted my time, my talents, and my opportunities, and ended by forming a marriage which would take a vast amount of popularity to make society forgive. They might well call me a prodigal ! However little the want of affection they had ever shown towards me entitled them to question my actions, or animadvert upon their probable cause, they were correct in saying that I had been lavish of the good I might have gathered.

To this train of feeling there succeeded better thoughts, and I began to ask myself if it was too late to rectify the error. What if I buckled on my armour again, with a firm determination to succeed, and to place Julia by my energy in the position for which my want of energy had unfitted her ? There was something in the idea which kindled my love of enterprise. The difficulty of its accomplishment urged me to the attempt. My father had taken a wife, by the irreproachability of whose morals and birth he might be aided in the toilsome ascent which leads to success : but I would use such mental powers as he had transmitted to me in winning for Julia a substitute for advantages to which she could never lay claim. If I failed, the trial alone would make me worthier of a place amongst men ; if I succeeded, the triumph would be greater than my father's had been !

Such thoughts as these, if they had no power to make me happier, at least caused me to be better contented with my-

self. I think I was more forbearing with my wife after that period. I know I tried to be. I gave up my irregular hours and bachelor habits, and spent my evenings in taking her about, or striving to amuse her at home. For the first time I inquired with interest into her tastes and pursuits ; and where they jarred on my finer sensibilities, considered how I might best direct the one or remodel the other without giving her offence. In this manner more than six weeks passed away since I had been to Kensington, when one day, on returning to my house, I saw a miniature brougham standing at the door, which, with a marvellously increased action of the heart, I recognised for that of Ada Penryhn, and felt that the little virtuous effort I had been making had already met with its reward. She had called to leave a note perhaps, or a message for myself ; I could hardly believe that it was for any other purpose, or that I should see her sitting in the company of my wife ; and yet when I rushed up to the drawing-room I found it was the case.

Ada was seated on the sofa, dressed in the deepest mourning, and looking so pale that only one who loved her as I did could have traced any remains of physical beauty in her face ; whilst Julia, robed in a violet silk which contrasted well with her fair hair and skin, lounged in an opposite chair, the impersonation of commonplace prettiness. As I entered the room, and with nervous hurry grasped the visitor's hand, I felt that the steady subdued glance which met my own was intended to remind me of the caution with which we had parted.

"I have been apologising to Mrs Estcourt," she said, in a firm, unquavering voice, "for not having called before, but I only returned from Scotland a few days ago."

"Pray don't mention it," I replied ; "it is very good of you to have come so soon : we are delighted to see you."

She spoke so quietly and looked so calm, that involuntarily I found myself speaking to her as if she were an ordinary acquaintance, and we had never met or parted with more than a shake of the hand before. She paused a moment as if to gather strength, and then went on.

"Mrs Estcourt has been telling me about the East, and all the wonderful things she saw at Alexandria and Cairo, and I have been quite interested. From her description, the country must be very beautiful."

"I cannot say I admired it," I answered; "but every one to his taste. I should like to have penetrated further, though, and think I shall go out again some day by myself, and visit the Holy Land."

"That would be delightful," said Ada; "but what would Mrs Estcourt say to your going alone? It must be so interesting to visit the places of which we have heard since we were children."

"I do not think Julia cares for any place but London," I replied.

"What is to be seen out there?" said Julia, appealing to myself.

"Surely you must remember that it was the spot of our Saviour's life and death. There is everything to be seen, from His birthplace to His grave."

"Not really! Are you laughing at me, Gerald?" And then, reassured by my gravity, "Why, I thought all that happened so long ago that nobody knew where it was; at least I never imagined that He lived in England."

"Nor did He, Julia," I said. "Jerusalem is no more in England than is Grand Cairo!"

"Well, I'm sure I didn't know that either," she cried; "we seemed a very short time going there."

"My wife has rather an exaggerated idea of the extent of her native land," I said, vexed at this display of ignorance; "but suppose we change the subject? My eastern travels are not a favourite topic with me. I suppose Mrs Penryhn, you are in town for the season."

"Yes; at least I have no intention of going away again; but season or no season will make little difference to me now."

She was alluding to the loss of her child; but I, interpreting her words according to my own fancy, by a sudden glance threw such a plea for mercy towards her, that the composure she had maintained since my entrance appeared all at once to desert her, and hastily rising, she murmured something about having already paid too long a visit. She shook hands with my wife and turned to me, but I refused the proffered farewell.

"I shall see you to your carriage," I exclaimed. She did not reject my services, but as we descended the staircase she looked at me reproachfully, saying, "Why did you come?"

"Because I wanted to thank you," I whispered, as I put

her into the brougham: "Ada, how can I ever do so sufficiently? I have ceased to look for such an attention from any one, but I never expected it of you,—of *you* least of all, —though I ought to have known how good and unselfish you are."

"Which is as much to say that you did not believe my promise to be your friend, Mr Estcourt," she answered, trying to speak lightly. "That was rather unflattering to my sincerity."

"Don't call me 'Mr Estcourt.'"

"I *must*," decisively; "Gerald, be reasonable."

"You will come again, Ada?" I asked; "you will often come to see us?"

But this was too much to require at her hands. Her colour came and went, until it left her paler than before, and she answered me hurriedly—

"I will come again, of course; at some future time, when Mrs Estcourt has been to see me, but not often; don't ask me to come often. I have done this for your sake, and that those who hold aloof from her and you may know what I think of their conduct; but my effort need not go farther. Calling often would be productive of no more good than calling once may be, and it might do harm. I am sure you will not misunderstand me."

"And may I not call upon you?"

She shook her head several times.

"Not without her,—don't think of it. You may imagine from my behaviour to-day that I am very strong, but you are mistaken. If ever you should want intelligence of, or advice from me, write, and to the utmost of my power I will be to you what I have promised,—a friend."

All this time she had been talking in a low voice, with her head drooping and her eyes downcast. Now she raised all three, and gave me a cheerful farewell.

"Good-bye, Mr Estcourt," with her hand in mine. "You will be glad to hear that my father has consented to let me have my sister Georgina to live with me; so I am not quite alone. She is to be introduced next year, and I am to superintend the finishing of her education until that time. So I have company, you see; I am not quite alone. Good-bye once more."

The carriage drove off, but I did not re-enter the house until it was out of sight. I knew she had given the last piece of information for my comfort. I knew that she had given it twice, because she felt it would remain with me, after she had gone, and prevent the bitter thought that she was carrying her desolate heart back to an empty silent house. I knew all this as plainly as if she had told me of it, and I blessed her unselfish and forgiving spirit.

When I returned to the drawing-room, I found my wife yawning with the *ennui* occasioned by my absence.

"What a time you have been away!" she said, in a tone of pique.

"Have I? I was talking with Mrs Penryhn. We are old friends, you know."

"Is not she the lady to whom you were engaged to be married?"

I had not known that Julia was aware of the name of my former *fiancée*, and feared that the fact of my attentions to Ada might rouse her jealousy. But I had no wish to try and deceive her.

"She is, Julia; but we have forgotten that now, or if not forgotten, the subject will never be revived between us. You will not dislike her on that account, will you, my dear? You ought to like her, since she has shown herself disposed to be friendly towards you."

My wife tittered at the idea of her being jealous of Mrs Penryhn.

"Of course not; I never thought a word about it; but I was surprised to see such a plain person." And she turned to the looking-glass and picked out her crimped bands of hair, and pulled her fluffy curls through her fingers. Her remark made me very indignant, but I restrained any expression of my feelings.

"It is as well you think so, Julia; you will be all the better pleased with your own appearance. But putting Mrs Penryhn's looks on one side, you must not forget that she is the only lady who has paid you the civility of a call, and therefore I hope you will always be as polite as possible to her in return."

She promised me that she would, for she was really gratified by the occurrence, and in about a week afterwards, I took her

to Kensington to return the visit. But we did not again see Ada, the usual excuse of "not at home" was given; whether the truth, or only an excuse, who could say? Although I was not used to judging her harshly, I inwardly inclined to the latter belief; it seemed to me so natural that, having gone through one great effort which she had forced herself to make, her courage should have broken down, and caused her to shrink from the idea of a second infliction. Neither was I altogether sorry that we had not been admitted: to receive Ada as a visitor in Brook Street was bitter enough to me, but to see Julia seated in that little drawing-room, where I had been so happy, and which teemed with the sweetest memories, would have been gall indeed. And a few days after we had called at Mrs Penryhn's, another circumstance occurred which made me even thankful that we had not entered her house. This was the fact of going into our drawing-room, under almost similar circumstances to those already related, and finding there, as before, a lady visitor sitting with my wife—two lady visitors indeed, but of a very different type from the first one.

"My mother," said Julia, with visible hesitation, as I pushed open the door, "and Adelaide, Gerald."

Faded Mrs Sherman, looking none the brighter for the lapse of years, I had recognised at once, but with the other figure I was not so familiar. Grown taller and stouter than my wife, dressed showily, with cheeks, highly coloured, either by nature or art, and a bold, impudent expression, there was nothing left but the fair hair and the blue eyes by which I could recognise Adelaide Sherman. As Julia mentioned her name, she turned towards me with a coarse laugh, saying—

"Well, you don't look as if you knew me, but if I remember right, I had as good a chance, at one time, of being Mrs Estcourt as my sister here. I don't think you thought there was a pin to choose between us at Grasslands."

By this time I had recovered myself. I had been compelled to shake the flabby hand which Mrs Sherman thrust into mine; but I had no intention of doing the same for her daughter, for I was quite taken aback by her effrontery in showing herself in my house; by her mother's in daring to accompany her; and by Julia's, in admitting them to her presence. It may be remembered that when first calling on Mrs

Sherman, in Islington, I was told that her daughter Adelaide was married to a man of property, but I had since ascertained that I had been grossly deceived on the subject. The knowledge had not troubled me much, for the girl's career was of no consequence to me, and her fate was just such a one as from our early acquaintance I should have predicted for her. Indeed, I had almost forgotten that such a person existed, for her name had not been discussed between Julia and myself for some time, and I expected confidently never to hear it revived. Judge, then, of my sensations, on finding this woman, comfortably located in my wife's drawing-room, where Julia had ordered tea to refresh the travellers, who had walked from Islington to Brook Street.

"What! aren't you going to shake hands?" exclaimed Adelaide Sherman, on perceiving my hesitation. "I don't call your behaviour very brotherly."

"Julia!" I said, and doubtless my voice conveyed the annoyance I felt, "I thought you were aware of my wishes on this subject, and that I told you plainly to admit no friends without first asking my leave."

"Not to admit her own mother, sir!" quoth Mrs Sherman, poisoning a piece of bread and butter mid-air, in order that she might the better open her mouth with astonishment. "I never heard tell of such a thing. You *do* surprise me. You can hardly be thinking of what you say, sir, I should imagine," and shutting her eyes with a look of the sublimest dignity, she popped the bread and butter into her mouth and closed her jaws upon it with a snap.

"I not only know what I am saying, Mrs Sherman," I replied, with decision, "but I mean it into the bargain. You attempted to deceive me with regard to both your daughters; but the story of Adelaide's marriage was too flimsy a one to dupe me long. Since that I have ascertained the truth, and fancy I know quite as much about the young lady as she knows herself. Under these circumstances, if you consider her a fit companion for her sister, I do not—and what is more, I shall not allow them to associate with one another."

"Oh, the barbarian!" exclaimed Mrs Sherman, helping herself, nevertheless, to more bread and butter as she spoke. "He would not only separate me from my girl, but teach her to look down upon the mother who reared her!"

"I shall not teach Julia to look down upon any of her family, Mrs Sherman, so long as they do not thrust themselves on my notice. But you must be aware that in marrying your daughter, I have done an unusual thing ; and the only means by which I shall be able to induce people in my station of life to associate with her will be by stopping all communication with those in her own. It is as much her interest as mine that this course should be strictly adhered to. But were Adelaide Sherman the highest-born lady in the land, she should never have the opportunity of contaminating the principles of a wife of mine."

I was not surprised at the storm which was brought upon me by the conclusion of my speech. I had expected it ; nay, was certain of its advent, but determined, nevertheless, to tell them my whole mind at once. Julia might be deceitful, unprincipled, and uneducated, but Julia was mine, and as long as she bore my name, she should have no friends but such as an Estcourt might acknowledge without shame.

I thought of how Ada had occupied that very sofa on which Mrs Sherman now sat chewing the cud in silent indignation ; of how Emmeline might be induced by the other's example to pay my wife a visit ; and what I should feel, what they would both think, were accident to bring them face to face with such visitors as these. The very idea brought loathing with it, and made me stand firm under the shower of vituperation by which I was assailed. The speaker was not Mrs Sherman ; it was the injured Adelaide who now stood forth in defence of her damaged character. But having no excuse to offer for herself, she fell back upon the not unusual retaliation of a female at bay, and strove to whitewash her own fame by blackening that of another. Need I say who was that other ?

I am not going to sully these pages by writing down the words which flowed from that infuriated woman's mouth ; the dreadful insinuations she made ; the infamous stories she repeated as facts ; or the mockery with which she treated my fears that she might contaminate my wife. As with horror I listened to her tirade of coarseness, I felt the blood curdle in my veins ; and I glanced from where she stood, crimson with the excitement of giving abuse, to the drooping figure of my wife, in hopes that she might muster courage to come forward and boldly give the lie to this defamer of her innocence.

But Julia did not stir ; did not flush with indignation ; did not even look up to meet the accusations hurled against her ; she leant pale and trembling against the mantelpiece. I sickened as I watched her lowered gaze and cowering attitude ; but I felt I must be the champion of the name she bore, however unworthily she carried it.

“*Stop !*” I said, in a voice of command. The energy conveyed by this monosyllable had an immediate effect. Adelaide Sherman halted in the midst of her sentence ; her mother discontinued a monotonous whine with which she had accompanied her daughter’s words, and a dead silence ensued. Advancing to the door I threw it wide open and waved my hand towards the staircase.

“Go,” I said, “go at once, and never presume to enter these doors again.”

Taken aback at this command, the mother shuffled up from the sofa, and hastily gathered her bag, umbrella, and other possessions, whilst the daughter turned towards the glass, and coolly arranged her bonnet-strings and veil.

“You wouldn’t be such a brute as to wish me to go without settling myself, surely,” she impudently remarked, in extenuation of the act.

“You can hardly be surprised,” I said, as the two women passed the threshold, “at the determination I have come to, that Julia shall never speak to you again with my permission. I believe what I have just now heard to be false as yourselves ; but that is a further reason for saying that I will never subject my wife or myself to a similar insult. From this hour you must regard her as a stranger, or I shall take means to make you do so.”

I saw them leave the house, and closed the door after them before I returned to the drawing-room. When I did so, my wife had left her position by the mantelpiece, to sink into a chair, where she sat, as pale and trembling as before.

“Well ?” I said, as I entered. The tone of interrogation was intended to intimate that I was ready to hear any excuses she might have to make for herself, or denial she might wish to give to the infamous assertions of her sister.

But Julia neither stirred nor spoke ; she seemed paralysed with terror, or the conviction of guilt. I looked at her for a few minutes in silence, and then I said, musingly—

"And when I asked you to tell me, as if before God, whether you knew of any reason why you should not be my wife, your answer was—none that I was not aware of."

I paused, believing that such a remark must bring some kind of answer, but none came, except the sound of tears, fast dropping upon a silken dress. At that I rose hastily and left the room: I could not even say, "God forgive you!"

"I claim the promise you made me," I wrote a few days afterwards to Ada Penrhyn; "advise me what to do. I feel as if I could not stay in London. The prospect of the coming season scares me; in another month my *intimes* will be in town, and I shall be moving amongst them like a moral leper, shunned by all, and pitied only by a few. I wish to leave it for another reason. I am not so strong as I thought myself. Brook Street is too near to Kensington for my peace of mind, and my life is wasting away with daily longing. Shall I be a coward and run away from it, or shall I stay and fight until it kills me? You shall decide."

"You must go away," she answered; "flight in this instance is not cowardice, but courage. Go to Grasslands; there you will find steady and innocent occupation, and that and time combined have great power to cure."

"To Grasslands!" I wrote, answering her letter by return of post, "never. What are you dreaming of? Do you think I will ever take my wife to live in the place where I hoped to settle down to a useful life, with *you*? You, who were to teach me what *living* means. How little you know me! how feebly you comprehend the daily struggle through which I pass, the one thought which possesses me night and day!"

But the reply which Ada sent me to this effusion was so mournfully decisive that I never dared so to address her again.

"If you will persist in alluding to the past," it said, "I shall be compelled to cease writing to you. I am willing to give you the full benefit of my advice, sympathy, and friendship, but only on the condition that you seek for nothing more. With regard to your decision about Grasslands, I think you are wrong; and I trust before long that you will see the propriety of not permitting the estate which your father bequeathed to your care to suffer for a fault for which you have no one to blame but yourself. Do not think me harsh; I

only wish to be faithful to you. For the present, however, why not go to the sea-side? There are plenty of quiet spots where you might avoid your quondam friends, and have leisure to think over the best plan for pursuing the career your father marked out for you. I have not lost the hope of being very proud of you some day, yet."

"Whatever else I have lost," she might have written; but Ada was too unselfish to give expression to the thoughts which haunted her as much as they did me. I took her advice, and resolved to quit London, greatly to Julia's disappointment,—a disappointment I could not understand, as she certainly had little to regret there; and within a few weeks more we were settled at a humdrum little watering-place on the southern coast of England. I had selected the spot on account of its quietude; and had taken care that there should be a spare room in the house capable of being turned into a study for myself.

For Ada's words had revived the hopes which I had previously entertained of my own energy as a means of bettering the position of my wife and myself in society: my enthusiasm was kindled afresh, and I inwardly resolved that if the spark died out again without leaving something better than ruin behind it, it should not be for want of care on my own part.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

EVERYDAY LIFE.

THERE are few things more difficult in relating a story than by one or two words, artistically chosen, to make the reader not only comprehend, but realise, that a certain period of time is supposed to have glided away in the space of half a dozen lines. It is easy to write down that two months or two years have elapsed since the close of the preceding chapter; but in the hurried manner in which most books of the present day are read, it is likelier than not that the meaning of the words is passed over, and the succeeding incidents appear unnatural,

or become hopelessly confused for want of the missing link. Julia and I stayed at the little quiet sea-side place for five months. We went there in March ; we did not think of returning to London until August ; at least *I* did not think of doing so, for, on retrospection, I fear that Julia's thoughts had often during that time strayed longingly to the joys she had left behind her.

For my own part, I was too busily engaged in working out a great idea which I had conceived to feel the monotony of our existence ; on the contrary, I enjoyed it. It tended to keep my thoughts even and undisturbed ; each day I went to my writing with renewed ardour, having lost nothing by encountering elements of distraction. I had never worked so hard in my life before : my conception, carefully carried out, had grown, (although not too rapidly,) and was in a fair state of progression. Altogether I was pleased, and thought I had reason to be pleased, with myself. And if my literary success had been my only object and care in life, I should have been justified in taking heart once more, and predicting, if not an entire reversal of public opinion, at least a mitigation of the blame which my last unfortunate production had incurred. But it was not my only care, far from it ! It is hardly to be supposed that I had forgotten the words which Adelaide Sherman had cast in my teeth ; that the remembrance of her base assertions had died away with their sound ; or that the thought that Julia had had nothing to say in her own defence had ceased to trouble me. The memory of them haunted me continually ; it cast a shade of bitterness over everything I wrote ; it made me more cynical, suspicious, and incredulous of good than I had ever been before.

Not that, in my eyes, an idol had that hour been cast from its pedestal, and discovered to be but common clay ; my wife, unfortunately, had never been more to me than a pretty, silly girl, with no moral courage, and not too much sense of honour.

But I had not thought so badly of her as *this* ; I had not dreamed that she could be what her sister represented her ; or that, being so, she was not sufficiently courageous or honourable to make me acquainted with the truth before I committed myself by marrying her. But it was all past now,—the opportunity for repentance on my part, the chance of her

refuting the charges brought against her on hers, even the hope of her confessing she had wronged me by her reticence, or regretted the duplicity she had practised, were alike faded—nothing remained but the gnawing doubt which was so much like certainty, and the suspicion which would not be laid. I did not tell this part of my history to any one; I locked it in my breast, and let it smoulder there, but it was none the less hard to bear because borne in silence, since nothing can be truer than the words of Seneca, that “*curæ leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent.*”

After a while, I found that my writing gave Julia great dissatisfaction. She thought it so very unsociable and disagreeable of me to lock myself up for hours together whilst she had no one to speak to.

“Cannot you take a book on the beach, Julia?” I would suggest, in answer to her querulous complaints, “or go and bathe, or take a drive in the country for the time that I am engaged. Anything would be better than hanging about the door of my study when you know I shall not be at liberty for hours.”

But Julia did not care for reading, or bathing, and to drive alone was such stupid work. *When* should I be ready to go out with her? How soon would the bothering book be finished? How many more weeks would it take to complete at this rate?

I tried to explain to her that it was for her interest as well as my own that I should succeed in my writing, and that she must make up her mind to see me always engaged for the best part of the day. It was not so bad, I told her, as the case of some wives whose husbands were never at home until late in the evening; and the worst thing that could befall both of us would be that I should remain entirely without occupation. But Julia was not very amenable to reason. She pouted and fretted over the little inconvenience of having to spend her morning hours alone, and would come so frequently to the door of my study, rattling the handle when she found it locked, and asking frivolous questions through the keyhole, that it often ended in my being thoroughly roused, and rushing out of my den to dismiss her in tears.

At last, she grew so thin and pale, cried so often, and complained so bitterly of my unkindness in having draggèd her

away from London, where she *could* amuse herself, and placed her in this horrid hole, where there was nothing to be seen, that I began to think it my duty to take her back again.

"But what will you do to make the time pass in London, Julia?" I asked, with a faint lingering hope of talking her out of the idea, for I dreaded bringing her and Ada again in contact. "The town will be quite empty now; the principal theatres are closed, and every one gone to the sea-side or the country. Surely we are better off here. I shall be obliged to write in Brook Street all the same, remember."

"I know that," she said, weeping; "but there are always the bazaars in London, and I like to walk about them and see the things; and I feel so ill here—and so miserable!"

The potency of this reason decided me: I would take her back to Brook Street. We had now been five months at the sea-side, and I felt stronger both in mind and purpose than when we went there; I had not seen Ada Penryhn, but I had often written to her, and was able to do so with less repining than before. It was not that I had become resigned to her loss, but that I had placed (as she had once told me to do) my profession on the topmost pinnacle of duty, and determined to make all other loves succumb to it. Therefore, in a great measure, I had lost my fear of meeting her again. But there was a reason unconnected with myself which urged me to be more considerate than before of Julia's wishes. It was true that she was not well, and often in low spirits, for she had the prospect of becoming a mother. If I said that this prospect pleased me I should say what is not true; nevertheless, I dared not grumble at what should have been regarded as a blessing, so I tried not to think of it, and absolved my conscience by that means. It was the end of August when we returned to London. The roads and parks were coated with dust; the leaves upon the trees shrivelled with the heat; the pavements hot beneath one's tread. All the world, worn out by the round of gaiety it had sustained during the three most trying months of the year, had flown to a purer, cooler atmosphere to revive its drooping graces. Town was a howling wilderness; only ourselves appeared to occupy it. It was meet it should be so, I said to myself, sullenly; what fitter than that pariahs should slink into the place when respectable people had just left it? But Julia

cared nothing for the dust, or the heat, or the howling wilderness ; she had regained her paradise, and her spirits returned to welcome it.

On the first night of our arrival she dragged me to the theatre ; by the next day she had found out an exhibition which she was determined to attend ; on the third, Tom Thumb and his retinue were to be exhibited at the Gallery of Illustration. At this juncture I ventured to remind her that I had not written a line since my return to London, and that in future her junketings must wait my leisure ; as duty came first, and pleasure afterwards.

"Then, can't I go alone, Gerald?" she said, in a voice of entreaty.

"Alone? certainly not, Julia ; but if you are so bent upon going, I will give up my writing for this afternoon and accompany you. But you really should take more care of yourself. The end of all this running about will be that I shall have you ill."

But, in her search after excitement, Julia had become insatiable ; she never seemed happy or quiet now except when she had some sight-seeing to look forward to.

One afternoon, when, having teased me nearly out of my life, she had, at last, left me to pursue my writing in peace, and driven off to Soho Bazaar, there to waste her money-upon frippery which was of no earthly use to her, a carriage stopped at our door, and through the open windows I could distinguish the voice of Ada Penryhn asking for Mrs Estcourt. I knew that she was in town and had apprised her of our return ; but although I felt very brave about meeting her again, and was quite sure that I had learned at last to make my love for her a secondary consideration to the glorious longing for fame which now stirred my breast, I felt somehow, when I heard the sound of her voice, as if, were there any chance of seeing her, I should greatly like to slink out by the back door and avoid it. But the next moment another idea had taken possession of me:

I heard the servant reply that his mistress was not at home, and then, after a little delay, an order was transferred from him to the coachman, and throwing my pen on one side, I bounded down the staircase, and appeared at the open door just as the vehicle had been again set in motion. It would

be too cowardly, I thought, purposely to shun speaking to her, when I had so far conquered my feelings as to render them subservient to my duty.

My sudden appearance was the signal for the carriage again to stop, and going up to it, to my great surprise and pleasure I saw, seated by Ada's side, my sister Emmeline.

"Why, Gerald!" she exclaimed, kissing me as I put my head in at the window, "the servant did not say that you were at home. How sorry I should have been to miss you!"

The shake of the hand which I received from her companion seemed terribly formal after that warm sisterly embrace, and as I pressed them, I could feel the trembling of her fingers. She was still looking pale and careworn, but to me it was the same face it had ever been.

"I am spending the day with Ada," continued my sister, "and so we came to call upon your wife together. Walter knew of my intention," she added, smiling.

"Thank you!" I answered, simply. "I am sorry that Julia should not have been at home to receive you, but she has gone out driving."

"And why are you not driving with her?" said Emmeline, playfully.

"Oh! I am too busy a man now, Emmy, to have any time to spare for running about. I have been writing ever since breakfast, and do not expect to leave off till dinner."

My sister opened her eyes.

"*Really*, Gerald? I am so glad to hear it. Why, what has wrought this good change in you? for though you have always been a dear boy, you have been an idle one withal."

"I know it, Emmy, culpably so; but I have begun to see the folly of frittering away my life in such a purposeless manner. I am really working now; and my desire to succeed is so strong that I hope I have some little chance of success."

"And what are you writing—another novel?"

"Yes."

"What is it about?"

"Do you expect me to tell you the whole plot standing in the street," I exclaimed, with a dash of the old cheerfulness; "it would be just like you, Emmy, if you did. I am afraid your curiosity must wait until you see it in print. But I will tell you the plan on which I am writing it. I have

taken the reviews of my other books, and compared them with the passages they condemn, and where the censure was just, carefully expunged such faults from the new one; and as I go on, I try to keep in mind, not what this or that paper will think or say, but what is truest to nature, worthiest of imitation, or most effectual as warning. I may fail again,—likelier than not, I shall; but I will put it out of the power of any critic to say that I have not tried, and tried *hard* to succeed.”

“That is the way!” exclaimed an eager voice on the other side of me. “That is the right method, which sooner or later *must* bring success.”

She had not spoken to me before, nor I to her; but now I turned suddenly, and caught her glowing eyes fixed upon me with the enthusiastic glance of old, which electrified whilst it seemed to chill me. I thanked her with a look, and addressing myself to her, continued—

“Ostensibly, Mrs Penryhn, I agree with you, but I have learned not to think popularity the only success worth having. It may never be mine, and yet I may succeed in rendering myself worthier of those who trust in me.”

She did not answer me in words; but the next time she looked at me, it was through moistened eyes. Perhaps Emmeline observed them, for she hastened to ask if I would not accompany them in their drive.

“We are going out to Hampstead, (didn’t you say so, Ada?) and there is just room for Gerald on the back seat. Come, dear, it will do you good, and we can have a long talk about your book.”

But this temptation I steadfastly resisted: I felt that Ada would never have made such a proposal, and I would not accept it coming from Emmeline. Besides, here was a glorious opportunity to test the new courage which I had so painfully acquired.

“No, thank you, Emmy; you must not try to lure me away from my business. I have been chattering with you too long already.”

“Nonsense, Gerald; and when we have not seen each other for an age. Come, jump in directly, and send the servant for your hat. I shall not trust you out of my sight again.”

I ran my fingers through my disordered hair, gave a downward glance at my working clothes, and laughed.

"I should cut a nice figure beside you two ladies, should I not? But you must take your drive without me, and much may you enjoy it. I dare say you think, Emmy, that I have no power to resist temptation, particularly when it comes in such a form; but that is only one of the many lessons I have been getting by heart at the sea-side."

I had begun my harangue with a laugh, I ended it with a sigh, and quickly bidding them farewell, walked into the house again. As I did so, I felt I had done a very grand thing and a very brave thing, in refusing what would have been to me so great a pleasure for the sake of duty; and as I re-entered my heated writing-room, and, sitting down at my desk, strove to take up the train of thought where I had dropped it, I experienced all the sensations of being a hero. But the effect seemed scarcely worthy of the cause. My pen soon settled itself in my inkstand, and was not removed thence; my papers were thrust to one side, and with my elbows on the table, my hands supported a head thinking too deeply of the interview which had just taken place, to have any time to devote to meaner ideas. Yes, I had been very courageous in speaking to her again; it gave me no pain now to meet her, knowing she could never be mine: I had certainly succeeded in making that puerile feeling of love succumb to higher duties; but—I wrote no more that day.

In a couple of hours my wife came home laden with purchases, and full of a piece of news which she had seen in printed bills upon the hoardings. During the ensuing month there was to be a masked ball given at one of the opera-houses, would I take her to it? It was what she had always longed to see, but never had the opportunity. She could not imagine what a masked ball was like. Would I? would I? would I? I *must* say yes. But "*yes*" was the very last word I intended to say.

"No, Julia, decidedly not; you must not ask me. In the first place, you are not strong enough to undergo so much fatigue; in the second, public masked balls are not attended by any ladies of the position you now occupy."

"But in the boxes, Gerald; it would not tire me to sit in the boxes; and I want so much to see the dresses."

"No, Julia, not even in the boxes: don't think me unkind. The dresses, except in being carried to extremes, will not differ much from those of an ordinary fancy ball."

"But I've never been to a fancy ball," she said, pouting.

"You have not had much loss; they are stupid affairs, I can tell you."

"Then you've been to them yourself. Have you ever been to a masked ball, Gerald?"

"Several; when I was younger than I am now."

"And yet you are determined I shan't go; I think you are very unkind to me."

"I should be still unkind if I permitted you to make yourself ill at this time, or sanctioned your appearance in a place where ladies are never seen. In a case like this, Julia, you must trust to my judgment, for I know the requirements of society better than you do."

"Well, I think it is very hard if a married woman cannot sometimes go where she has a mind to," replied my wife, evidently much disturbed. "I believe you would have me mope in the house from one year's end to another if you had your will."

"Indeed you are mistaken, Julia. I will take you to any amusement in which you can engage, and where it is proper you should be seen; but masked balls in this nineteenth century are no longer fit assemblies for respectable women to appear at, and therefore inadmissible for my wife. But cannot you think of any other sight that you would enjoy as much, and could attend with more propriety? I am willing to give up any reasonable amount of time to make you happy and contented; but I really think that you have chalked out about as many engagements for the next few weeks as you will be able to fulfil. We are going to the theatre to-morrow, you know, and there is the Crystal Palace for Monday, and you have taken those tickets from George Lascelles for the Zoological Gardens, and told me of two pieces you wish to see acted next week; and you may be sure by the time those are fulfilled that you will have made as many more. So now try and be contented, like a good girl, and show me all the treasures you have brought home from the Soho Bazaar."

When Julia's temper was once discomposed—and it did not take much to ruffle it—it was usually a hard matter to

bring her round again ; but in the present instance a few judicious compliments, and praises of the admirable way in which she had laid out five pounds in purchasing rubbish for which I should have been sorry to give five shillings, proved effectual in restoring her complacency, and, as I thought, in banishing altogether from her mind the idea of attending the masked ball.

A few days after this occurrence, I received a letter from my mother. It may be remembered that the epistle she sent me on the occasion of my marriage was such as to preclude all idea of an amicable meeting between us, and therefore I had suffered her to leave England again without attempting to bring about an interview. Since which time we had dropped all correspondence, and it was with more of curiosity than of any other feeling that I broke the seal of her present communication. But as I perused it, I could not but smile : it was my mother all over, from the first word to the last. She commenced by reproaching me bitterly for not having called on her in London, or indeed followed her to Paris. The "*miserable* circumstances," she wrote, which had formed the subject of our last letters had nothing whatever to do with my duty towards herself ; but, thank God, *she* did not forget what was due from a mother to a son, however ungrateful he had proved himself. A little farther on I gleaned the cause of this maternal outburst to be that the marriage of my sister Lillas with Monsieur Le Sage had at last been fixed for the close of the succeeding month of September, and Lady Mary was very anxious that I, as representative of the family and the girl's nearest relative, should give the bride away. Of course this was all very correct and as it should have been. I was the proper person to give my sister away in marriage, and it would have appeared strange to the friends of Monsieur Le Sage if I had refused to be present on the occasion. But my mother's mode of putting the request was the curious part of it to me. That in order to gratify her family pride and love of consequence, she should stoop to ask a favour of the son whose heart she would sooner have broken than do for him what she now demanded he should do for herself—namely, sacrifice his inclinations at the shrine of his affections—and, above all, that she should strive to explain away the marvel of this humiliation on the ground of her not having

forgotten her duty towards *me*, however much I had neglected mine. As soon as I had fully digested the wonderful logic which this letter contained, I carried it off to Emmeline, and asked her advice on the subject. She gave it without hesitation.

"Oh! you must go, Gerald, without doubt. Ethel is to be one of the bride's-maids, so Walter and I shall be there, and we will travel together. Mamma's former letter was exceedingly offensive, there is no denying it; but after all, dear, she is your mother, and you had given her cause to be angry. This is a good opportunity to make it up again."

"But I cannot forget the terms in which she wrote of my wife, Emmeline, nor that I am invited to be present at a ceremony whence Julia will be the only one excluded. Do you not think there will be something *infra dig.* in my attending the marriage without her?"

"No, Gerald, I do not; I will take care to make it known that *I* am acquainted with her, (for Emmeline had met Julia before this conversation took place,) "and the state of her health would be quite sufficient (if an explanation is needed) to account to strangers for her absence. And I think that your readily acceding to mamma's wishes in this respect may be the best means of bringing about the desired change. If she sees that you do not openly resent her behaviour towards your wife, she will be the more disposed to make amends for it. But it would be long before a second rupture between you could be healed."

I acknowledged the truth of my sister's words, and felt that, instead of furthering, I should injure Julia's cause by refusing my mother's request. I therefore wrote as civil an answer to her letter as circumstances would allow, promising to be in Paris with the Talbots a few days before the wedding. Having once made up my mind to go, the prospect was more pleasant to me than otherwise. I did not much anticipate meeting my mother, and Beatrice, and Gertrude; but I had a real desire to see poor Marguerite again, and to spend a short holiday in the company of the Portsdownes and Lascelles. When the time for departure arrived, I left my wife without any fears. She was in tolerable health and spirits, and having obtained my permission to frequent the bazaars during my absence as much as she liked, provided

she always took Saunders to protect her, did not appear to indulge in any of her usual misgivings with regard to being left alone.

I cautioned her strenuously against over-exertion ; told her I trusted to her not to encounter the night air, and promised to bring her back from Paris, as a reward for obedience, the prettiest bonnet that Emmeline could choose, and the biggest box of bon-bons that money could procure.

She seemed pleased with the confidence I placed in her, and with her arms around my neck, assured me again and again that she would do as I desired. As, at last, I left her, after she had followed me into the passage to say good-bye for the third or fourth time, and remembered, with the impress of her clinging arms still about me, her youth, (for at this period she was but one-and-twenty,) and her want of moral education, I had kinder thoughts of the mother of my unborn child than I had entertained for months before, and took courage almost to hope that the two great co-operatives, time and patience, would yet have power to uproot much of the evil which was due to the bad examples under which she had been reared.

And so potent did the charm of this idea prove to dispel temporary annoyances from my mind, that Emmeline declared I bore the inconveniences of the short passage and subsequent railroad travelling better than any of them, and that I looked so like myself, that it was almost as good as old times to have me with her again.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SUDDEN SUMMONS.

I HAD not been in Paris many hours before I proved the advice which Emmeline had given me to be as judicious as it was kind. My mother (now an old lady considerably past sixty) received me almost affectionately, even condescending, as she embraced me, to express a hope that I had left "Mrs

Estcourt " well. Beatrice and Gertrude, in the plentitude of their wealth and prosperity, appeared to have forgotten, or, at all events, to ignore, the circumstances under which we had parted ; and Lord and Lady Portsdowne gave me as hearty a welcome as though I had allied myself to one of the royal family.

" What induced you to shirk town this season, Gerald ? " asked my uncle the first time we found ourselves together.

I told him how bitterly I had felt the behaviour of my own relations, and how I had had serious thoughts, not only of avoiding an unnecessary encounter, but of refusing altogether to meet them, as on the present occasion.

" Pooh, pooh ! " he said, in his old paternal manner ; " you shouldn't allow yourself to be influenced by what a pack of girls, puffed up with their own consequence, say. You've made a mistake, Gerald, and a deuced bad mistake, there is no doubt about that, but putting up your back at every one who tells you so is not the way to rectify the matter. If you have patience, things may right themselves some day ; there's no saying ; but if you can't make up your mind to swallow a little humble pie, they'll never come round. I have been talking a good deal to your mother about it since I've been here, and I am sure that forbearance on your part will go a long way with her. In fact, you've got yourself into a muddle, Gerald, and you mustn't be too proud to stoop to get out of it. I speak to you as I would to one of my own children. Play your cards well, and things may look brighter in course of time ; but, if not, don't forget that you've brought it on yourself."

The interest and affection which my uncle evinced for me took away much of the roughness of this speech, and where I might have been offended left me only room to be grateful. I wrung his hand in reply, but I had no words wherewith to answer him. I had serious doubts whether his kindly prophecies of a probable amelioration in the social position of my wife would ever come true, but I would not permit them to poison the pleasure which I really experienced in meeting my family again. I found that my sisters, generally, were disposed to make as great a pet of me as of old, but Lillas, of course, was the great centre of attraction. Her want of natural comeliness, and the thirty years which she had honourably attained,

were in a great measure hidden, or compensated by the extreme elegance of her Parisian manners and attire, and she promised to make a much more interesting bride than I had given her credit for. Neither, except on the old score of his faith, had I any fault to find with my prospective brother-in-law. Monsieur Le Sage was undoubtedly a gentleman, more than a gentleman indeed, if the stories, for ever in his mouth, of the *ancien régime* and the *ancien noblesse*, and the exalted position which his family belonging to the latter held under the former, were to be believed.

That he was long, and brown, and skinny, gesticulated and grimaced like a true foreigner, and would never see fifty again, were matters entirely for Liliás' private consideration: the part of the business which concerned myself, namely, to ascertain if the account given of the rent-roll of his various estates was correct, was soon settled to our mutual satisfaction, and, all things considered, I began to think that my sister could not have done much better.

I was also pleasantly surprised to find that Marguerite was improved in health. On first being removed from Grasslands, she had so visibly retrograded that my mother, in alarm, had consulted a Parisian physician, celebrated for the cure of spinal diseases, and, in consequence of the new treatment he had pursued with her, Marguerite was certainly stronger than she had been. She was not able to take much exercise, but she no longer lay on the sofa all day; and although the doctor did not hold out any hopes of a complete recovery, he confidently affirmed that, with care, she need never be worse than she was at present. The poor girl spoke most gratefully to me of the improvement in her health, and what an enjoyment it was to her to be able once more to move about the house and take carriage exercise; indeed, she seemed to wish for nothing further. There was only one thing in life which she regretted, and that was her separation from Emmeline. But she had hopes (she confided to me) that if her health continued as it was, her mother might consent to her visiting England again. "For she will always be hankering after Liliás, Gerald, and it would be very inconvenient to take me about with her. I shall never be able to stand much travelling."

In this conjecture I readily agreed. Liliás, strange to say,

notwithstanding the inferiority of her mental and physical attractions, had always been the favourite daughter ; and, now that she was about to lose her, my mother took no pains to conceal what she felt at the thought of the impending separation.

"What I shall do without Liliás I know not," she would exclaim ; "the interest of my life will go with her."

"*Tais-toi chérie*," Liliás would reply, (her attachment to her mother was the only thing I could ever find to admire in her ;) "you know that you have promised Henri and myself to come and live at the Château d'Essignay as soon as we return from Italy, and therefore we shall not be more than a month apart from each other."

"And what is to become of poor Marguerite, meanwhile ?" whispered Emmy in my ear on the occasion alluded to ; "no one seems to think of her."

"I do, Emmy," I answered, in the same tone, "and shall speak to my mother on the subject before we separate."

Meanwhile arrived the eventful twenty-fifth of September, the day appointed for the marriage, which had to be solemnised twice over, according to the rites of both churches, and at each performance of which, I flatter myself, I ably achieved my paternal duty.

I thought the long ceremonies, however, rather calculated to induce melancholy in any but the two people whom they immediately concerned, and was about to express a similar opinion on the breakfast by which they were followed, had not my sister Beatrice pronounced it a *grand affair*, and conducted in far better style than she had given my mother credit for.

As she said this, glancing through her eyeglass down the long tables covered with flowers and bon-bons, and was, moreover, considered a high authority on everything connected with fashion, I refrained from giving vent to the feeling of boredom with which their appearance had inspired me. Certainly, if five or six tables laden with few things that one cared to discuss at noon, and crowded with strangers so full of chatter that it was difficult to hear one's own voice, constituted grandeur, my sister Liliás's wedding breakfast was a very grand affair indeed.

The *ancien noblesse* had no lack of representatives there, in

the shape of scores of dried-up yellow faces and prominent noses, (about the aristocracy of which there could be no dispute,) and by such an influx of French millinery as could only be equalled by the amount of French syllables which were dropping from every mouth. In compliment to the wedding guests, nothing but French was spoken at the table, and I could scarcely realise, when they forced me on my legs to return thanks for Lady Mary, that it was about my English mother and my English sisters that I was making, on such an occasion, a very broken speech in a foreign tongue. In the midst of it, just as I had arrived at that part where it became necessary that I should allude to the excellence of my sister's choice, the remembrance of the evangelical curate, the Bible meetings, and the Dorcas associations, of Guildford, flashed with irresistible comicality across my mind, and I smiled on the company in such a beaming manner that they must have imagined I was highly content with the acquisition of a Roman Catholic brother-in-law.

"Gerald, Gerald! what are you laughing for?" exclaimed Emmeline, in a low voice, when, unable to keep serious any longer, I had brought my speech to a sudden close and sat down again.

"Gerty, Emmeline, Marguerite!" I appealed to each in turn, "*do* you remember the 'list' tippets, and hoods, and the prayer-meetings, and the Sunday-school classes at Guildford?"

"Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol est qui s'y fie,"

cried Beatrice, quoting Francis the First's memorable couplet.

"What does it signify?" exclaimed Gertrude; "I am sure this is a much more respectable marriage than the other would have been."

"Oh, hush!" said Emmeline, "Lilias might hear you."

I often thought that my three elder sisters never expressed their opinions on the most ordinary subject without openly revealing the wide difference which existed in their characters.

The wedding breakfast was over at last. Madame La Comtesse had said farewell to her affectionate family in a very matter-of-fact style, the representatives of the *ancien noblesse* had dispersed to their several homes, and finding that

my own people were not disposed for any further excitement until the evening, (when we were to attend a private ball given by some friends of Monsieur Le Sage,) I left them to the repose they needed, and went out for a stroll by myself.

My mother's house was situated in the Champs Elysées. Crossing the Place de la Concorde, I sauntered leisurely along the streets on my way to the Boulevards. Paris was familiar enough to me, and as I proceeded, my thoughts were too fully occupied to allow me to take much note of what passed around me ; not with the events of the morning, but with the topic which had formed the matter of conversation between my uncle Portsdowne and myself ; with the speculation that if I was prudent, my wife might even yet be acknowledged by my family. I was thinking how pleasant it would be could I see the poor girl in the position to which marriage with myself had entitled her ; of how quickly, first prejudices being vanquished, she might gain upon them with her beauty ; of how contented (having so effectually resigned myself to the Inevitable) my life ought thenceforth to become.

As I mused thus deeply, walking along with my eyes bent on the ground, a sudden noise and a French oath roused me from my reverie. I was crossing the Boulevards, and had narrowly escaped being knocked down by a carriage, the driver of which, having seen me step out of the way, now lashed on his horses to make up for lost time. Mechanically, as it passed me, I gazed in at the open window of the vehicle ; but with the first glance my indifference had fled, for leaning forward, as if to catch a glimpse of the careless pedestrian whom her coachman had nearly driven over, I saw a face which I had never forgotten ; a delicately featured face with mournful dark eyes—no other than that of Mrs Rivers. For a moment it flashed upon me, as I had seen it last when gazing into the night, and then the carriage rolled quickly on, and it was gone. Whether she had recognised me, I could not tell ; whether she wished to avoid me, I did not consider ; my sole idea was that the only person who could really help me to clear myself in the eyes of Ada Penryhn was being borne further from me every minute ; and that in this crowded city I had no more means of ascertaining her address (if she had chosen to conceal her name) than I had in London. With a call to the coachman to stop—a call which either he did not

hear, or did not see fit to obey—I rushed after the fast retreating vehicle. Back across the Boulevards, up the Rue de Rivoli, over the Place de la Concorde, I ran, breathless, but undaunted ; now losing sight of the carriage as it turned down some short cut ; then keeping it in full view for several minutes as it crossed a more open space ; anon feeling that I could neither strive to gain upon it, nor holloa after it any longer, and that, however reluctantly, I must give up the chase. When I did so, I was thoroughly vexed ; I had paid no attention to the public ridicule which had attended my flying footsteps, nor had the idea what the lady herself would say to my pursuing her, troubled me ; I had only thought of the possibility of clearing myself in Ada's eyes ; but now that the chance was lost, at all events for the present, I became conscious that I must have cut rather a ludicrous figure, tearing helter-skelter through the principal thoroughfares of Paris, and began to hope that none of the friends of Monsieur Le Sage had witnessed and recognised me.

I had nothing now to do but to think of that, for the carriage had long rolled out of sight, and annoyed at my defeat I retraced my steps to my mother's house. But how different in character were my meditations from those with which I left it !

The sight of Mrs Rivers had set my thoughts on fire ; I could think of nothing now but the probable reason for her being in Paris ; and of what chance I had, unaided, of discovering her abode. And when I flattered myself that the hope of doing so (notwithstanding that I suspected she might be residing there under an assumed name) was not unreasonable, and calculated in that case on the certainty of my being able to persuade her to do as I wished with respect to her daughter, my pulses danced, and my blood circulated in sudden rushes which no self-assurance, repeatedly and sternly given, that, whatever satisfaction the accomplishment of my desire might bring with it, happiness for me was thenceforth out of the question, had power to subdue.

Thoughts of my love, however barren of the element of hope, possessed for my heart a fascination which no others could boast of, and which made me almost smile as I recalled the subject of my previous reflections, and remembered how I had attempted to delude myself with the idea that the world con-

tained no topic which could more powerfully influence my future. And all the time it had held—Ada.

Oh, Ada, always first,—best,—nearest to my soul! How could I ever have tried to deceive myself with regard to you?

The evening's amusement passed drearily to me; whilst I was dancing with, or striving to make myself agreeable to my mother's friends, my mind was constantly reverting to the worn face which had gazed on me from the carriage window, or weighing the probabilities of seeing it again.

I had little rest that night, and immediately I awoke I became absorbed with the same thoughts, and chafed under the knowledge that, for the present at least, there was no possibility of my pursuing the search on which I longed to enter; for some sports, which we had agreed to witness, were to take place at Chantilly on that day, and all preparations for the pleasure trip had been completed some time before. I was forced, therefore, to keep to my engagement, although I would fain have excused myself, could I have brought forward any plausible motive for doing so. But it was not to be. I was dragged off to Chantilly by a trio of peremptory sisters, who refused on any terms to take a denial from me; and I must confess that, notwithstanding the distraction of my mind, I enjoyed myself very much upon that particular day. It was so like the old times to hear my mother address me in tones of kindness; to loiter away the hours in congenial company with one or other of my blooming sisters hanging on my arm, and not a dissentient voice amongst us to mar the harmony of the scene. Not a shadow rested on that day of pleasure; I think I may almost say that not a thought of Julia crossed my mind; and that even when it dwelt on Ada, I could acknowledge that this world holds, if not a cure, at least a balm for disappointed love. Shall I be considered colder or less faithful than the rest of men in deliberately vouching for the truth of the above statement?

For my own part, I fancy there are few sinners who have not at times found, in outward circumstances, relief for mental pain. Yet still, if, being deceived, I am the solitary exception to an universal rule, on commencing this history I pledged myself to write it honestly.

We did not return from Chantilly till late in the evening, and as we reached my mother's house the clocks were striking

eleven. I had been in high spirits all the way home, and entered the lighted supper-room in the same mood. Several letters which had arrived during our absence were lying on the plates set for their owners: a long unstamped envelope lay on mine. I knew at once it was a telegram; as I recognised it, an unknown fear seemed to rise within me, and my hilarity fled. I sprang forward, seized the missive, and in another moment had torn it open. The lights danced and flickered before my eyes as they fell upon its contents, and with a trembling hand I flattened the paper twice before I had thoroughly mastered them.

"From James Saunders, London, to Gerald Estcourt, Esq., Paris.

"SIR,

"You are respectfully entreated to return immediately; my mistress is dangerously ill."

"You are respectfully entreated to return immediately," I mumbled to myself, staring meanwhile at the telegram; "my mistress is dangerously ill; you are respectfully entreated to——"

"Gerald, what *is* the matter? Is anything wrong? do tell us, Gerald; don't keep us in suspense."

It was Emmeline's voice, and she was shaking my arm impatiently. I turned and looked her full in the face, and then, for the first time, I seemed to understand what was before me.

"I must go back to London at once," I exclaimed, impetuously, confronting the whole party; "my wife is ill; I cannot stay here another hour."

"But, my dear Gerald," said my mother, "consider the time. No reasonable person could expect you to set off on such a journey at eleven o'clock at night, and so tired as you must be. Surely, if you went the first thing in the morning——"

"I must go without delay," I replied, with decision; "there is a midnight train which I can easily catch. I ought never to have left her alone; she is a great deal too delicate; but now I must return at once. Pray do not attempt to detain me."

"I have no wish whatever to detain you against your will, Gerald," said Lady Mary, with a *soupeçon* of the old jealous feeling, "nor, I conclude, have your sisters. Dessanges, see that Mr Estcourt's portmanteau is packed at once, and a *voiture* at the door in time to convey him to the twelve o'clock train. And now, my dear Gerald," (in a voice of persuasion,) "if you *must* go, you will sit down and make a good supper before you start."

"Thank you, not a morsel," I said, impatiently; "I really could not eat anything."

Knowing the general opinion of my family with respect to Julia, I shrank from letting them see or hear what I felt at the news of her danger, but in reality my heart was filled with a feeling of self-reproach, that was harder to bear than the dread of any impending sorrow. For whilst she had been ill, in pain perhaps, (the telegram necessarily gave so few particulars, that my imaginary fears knew no bounds,) but certainly in danger, I, her husband, and her only friend, had been revelling in scenes of gaiety, enjoying myself, without even a thought of her welfare troubling my mind; nay, more, I was conscious that for the last twelve hours my guilty heart had been completely occupied with the image of another woman, to the utter repudiation of that of my poor little wife, who had been suffering meanwhile without a creature near her. When I had bid my mother and sisters farewell, and leaving Paris behind me at the rate of twenty miles an hour, lay back on the cushioned seats of the railway carriage and tried to compose myself to the sleep which I greatly needed, the same reproachful thought rose up to banish all idea of rest for mind or body.

It was not so much the knowledge of Julia's illness that oppressed me, as that she had been ill *alone*. Other women had mothers, sisters, or friends to go to them, if need required, and render all those kindly offices which woman's hand alone can do for woman; but this unfortunate girl, deprived of the society of her own family by my command, and of that of mine by their caprice, might die before a soul in that great city would go to succour her. By my folly I had exalted her to a position which forbade her association with any but those of my own standing; but *from* one, alas! which caused those of my own standing to pass by on the other side.

I had taken from her the friendship and sympathy of her own kind, and I had none to offer her in return.

And having wronged her by so fatal a mistake, I could not even give her my affection.

Oh, barren, useless life ! Oh, hand that turned each sweetness that it grasped to poison ! Oh, man, who had better never had been born !

So whispered to me my repentant spirit, as the train rushed onwards through the midnight air, and every wail of the autumn wind sounded like a lament for the past which nothing could recall ; and the future which should never—never be.

And in the hurry and distress of my departure I had totally forgotten to speak to my mother concerning Marguerite. But then I had as certainly lost sight of my strong desire to find out the address of Mrs Rivers.

In fact, I may truly say that on that homeward journey no fancy troubled me but such as had intimate relation to the wife to whom I was hastening.

CHAPTER XL.

A SHOCK—BUT A RELEASE.

I TRAVELLED as expeditiously as I could ; but having started by an unorthodox train, I was compelled to submit to some delay with regard to crossing the Channel ; and it was the evening of the following day before I stood at my own door in Brook Street. I had become very impatient as I drew near home, and in my impatience I knocked loudly for admittance, and swore at myself the next moment for being so careless. My wife might be sleeping, or, in all probability, had been ordered to be kept quiet, and I should have roused her by making such a noise. My summons was quickly responded to ; and it was Saunders who opened the door to me.

"I thought it was yourself, sir," he said, as if to account for his own appearance.

"Shall I have disturbed your mistress?" I asked, eagerly ;
"I never thought of it when I knocked."

The man's face, for all that could be read there, was a blank.

"Oh, no, sir ! I think not," he replied, quietly.

"How is she, Saunders ? Who is attending her ?"

I was in the hall by this time, and about to pass up the staircase.

"Will you step in here, if you please, sir ?" he exclaimed, laying his hand quickly on the dining-room door, "you are wanted."

I retraced my footsteps, imagining that the doctor wished to speak to me about my wife's illness. Saunders opened the door ; I passed through it, raised my eyes to a figure which advanced to receive me, and to my astonishment met—Ada Penryhn.

"Ada !" I exclaimed, falling back a pace or two, "*you* here ? who sent for you ? why did you come ?"

But directly I encountered the yearning expression of her eyes, noted the weary look which told of a sleepless night, and felt the warm pressure with which her hand grasped mine, I guessed the truth.

"Yes, I am here, Gerald," she answered, quietly, "and I am the *only* one here to welcome you. You understand, do you not ? She is gone."

Although I had guessed the news which awaited me, I had not had time to realise it, and the first shock of its reception was great. I withdrew my hand from Ada's, and throwing myself into a chair, sat silently for a few minutes with eyes bent upon the ground, *trying* to believe it.

"Gerald !" said a soft voice, and the lightest of touches fell upon my drooping head, "everything was done for her that could be done ; it was the will of God."

"When did it happen ?" I asked, huskily.

"At sunrise, and quite painlessly ; she was unconscious for hours before."

"And the cause ?"

"A premature delivery. She was taken ill on the twenty-fourth."

“Who attended her, Ada?”

“Dr Percivale, and Dr ——, and Dr ——,” she replied, naming two of the physicians most celebrated for such cases. “I knew that your wish would be that she had every assistance, and so I sent for them on my own responsibility. Dr Percivale would have stayed to see you himself had we been more certain of the time of your arrival, but I expect he will call in again this evening. He will tell you that nothing that was possible to do was omitted.”

“I’ll go up and see her,” I said, abruptly, and I rose and left the room; but Ada did not follow me.

I stumbled blindly up the lighted staircase, which seemed to surge beneath me as I trod. On the landing I met a couple of servants, who stood close against the wall to let me pass, whilst they curiously scrutinised my face to see how I had borne the news; in the bedroom which had been *ours* I saw candles burning, and heard the murmur of a subdued colloquy.

I walked into it without ceremony, and going up to the bed drew back the curtains. I could distinguish the outline of the form which lay there in so stiff and unnatural a position; but for aught I could see to the contrary, Julia might only have been sleeping.

“Bring a light,” I said to one of the women who were gliding noiselessly about the room. A candle was thrust into my hand, and I moved it backwards and forwards over the pale, dead face, until I had satisfied myself that those eyes would never reopen, nor that mouth address me more. It was really true, then. Julia lay dead before me! The life which I had so often felt to be an incubus to my own had suddenly been quenched. She could never vex or shame me more: I could never again wrong her. As I stood there, I prayed God that the record of my sins against her at the judgment-day might prove no heavier than hers to me.

“Who are you?” I demanded, as I returned the light, and saw that the woman who received it was a stranger.

“The nurse, if you please, sir,” she said, curtsying. “Mrs Penrhyn, who has known me for years, sent for me to attend your dear lady as soon as she saw how matters was likely to be. But it was of no manner of use, sir; for directly I set foot in this house, I knew that the poor dear was to go.”

As she still held the light, so that its reflection was cast

upon the figure of my dead wife, I drew down the sheet which covered her hands.

"What's that?" I said, starting, as a little waxen effigy which lay upon her arm came into view.

"Why, that's the poor babe, sir; it never lived, pretty dear; but I thought you'd like to see it in its proper place."

The intelligence of Julia's death had so shocked me that I had never thought of inquiring about the infant to which she had given birth. But there it lay: a tiny, dark-haired atom of humanity, on which the breath of God had never breathed, and of which my first look was to be my last. Somehow the sight of this blighted blossom affected me more than my wife's corpse had done; a strange sensation crept over me as I thought that this was *mine*, and might have lived and learned to love me; and desperately swallowing something which had swelled into my throat, I drew the sheet again over the mother and the child, and turned away from the bed of death.

"She was unconscious when she died, Mrs Penryhn tells me," I said to the nurse, after the silence of a few minutes, during which she had made the air heavy with her professional sighs.

"Oh, bless your heart, yes, sir! she knew nothing from the time the baby was born'd, poor dear, but just slipped away, as you may say. But *my* lady, that's Mrs Penryhn, begging your pardon, sir, never left her for a moment."

"When did Mrs Penryhn come here, then?"

"Well, sir, I believe she was sent for on the afternoon of the twenty-fourth, for that was the date she wrote for me. And I know she never left the poor lady alone from that time; for there she was, a follering of her about, and a giving her food, and a keeping up her sperrits, till the poor thing was forced to lie down, and then Mrs Penryhn stood by that pillar till she died. And, when the last came, sir, conscious or unconscious, your poor lady had her arms round my lady's neck, and that's just how she went, a clinging to her like a sister. I'm sure I can't think upon it now with dry eyes, and Dr Percivale—he said that——"

The old woman's eloquence was too much for me; I dared not trust myself to listen to it longer; and without waiting to hear what Dr Percivale had said, I went out quickly and left her to finish her story to herself.

As I again turned the handle of the dining-room door, I could not think what I should say to Ada; in what words I could sufficiently thank and bless the womanly benevolence which had prompted her not only to come at the call of suffering, but so nobly to fulfil the task she had undertaken.

She was seated at the table as I entered, dressed in her walking attire, ready for departure.

"I am going home now, Gerald," she said, on perceiving me. "I wish you had some one to stay with you. Shall I write to any of your relations for you? Is there anything more that I can do?"

"Anything more," I exclaimed, vehemently, "when I have been wondering how I can thank you for what you have already done. Ada! my greatest trouble on hearing of my poor wife's danger was to think that she was suffering alone. I forgot that my good angel was so near her, with a heart large enough for anything."

"You forgot, Gerald," she softly replied, "that God was better able to take care of your wife than you were."

"Oh, let me praise you," I said. "Don't try to make out that all the world is like yourself; who ever came near my poor girl except you, and Emmeline, whom you persuaded to come? Other women caught up the skirts of their dresses as they passed her in the street, avoiding her as though she had been infected with the plague; but *you*, who of all others had the right to be offended with me, and to hold aloof from the woman who had usurped the place I swore none but yourself should fill, came boldly forward in defiance of the world's opinion, and gave your hand to her who never held that of such another: and now you have crowned your unselfishness by rendering me the greatest possible service; such a service as I never could have presumed to ask of you. Ada! they have told me that she died upon your breast."

There was silence between us for a few succeeding minutes, for we were both affected by the solemn memory my words had conjured up, and next she rose and said, calmly—

"If it *is* the greatest service I could do you, Gerald, you are heartily welcome to it, though I hardly see how I could have acted otherwise. You told me long ago that were I tested I should find how hard it is to run counter to the laws of society in face of the opinion of my (so-called) respectable

friends. I have been tried, and you see that I did not speak without reason ; but you may attribute my conduct to the obstinacy of my nature, or to anything rather than to virtues that I do not possess. Were it not for the peculiar opinions which, pondering over the uncertainty of my mother's fate, grafted upon me, and the feeling of championship for my sex engendered by them, added to my friendship for yourself, I might never have become acquainted with your wife ; but for this last assistance, which I am glad to think it has befallen me to render her, there needed no stronger reason than that she was a woman, and alone."

She gave her hand to me as she concluded, and clasping mine in a firm pressure, which told of strength to bear the burdens of others as well as those which fate allotted to herself, left the room.

I let her go without attempting to detain her. I would have given worlds to have kept her with me, but I knew that it could not be, and that the mere request would give her pain. She had dawned upon that house of suffering like an angel of mercy, but she had completed her errand—there was nothing more for her to do—and so she left me in the silent rooms alone.

I could not choose but sit and think of her. Even with the lifeless bodies overhead, and self-reproach knocking incessantly at my heart's door, I could not choose but recall each fair page of Ada's history which had been unfolded to me, and remember that from first to last, with all her womanly softness and grace, she had maintained a most *unwomanly* consistency. What she had said, she meant ; what she had promised to perform, she had done ; what she had loved, she loved for ever ! I had never seen her yield when resistance was duty : I had never seen her obstinate where concession was a grace. She was strong only for herself ; weak only for others ; and bore upon her heart, as on her open face, the impress of perfect and unflinching truth.

Far into the night I occupied the place where I had parted with her ; but it was not until I had made several journeys to the room where Julia's body lay, that I could really persuade myself that all that I had heard was not a dream. For long I anxiously expected to see Dr Percivale, and learn the particulars of the case from his lips, but, from some cause or

other, he did not come ; and hours had elapsed when Saunders opened the dining-room door and put in his head to inquire, in the most subdued and deferential of voices, if I would not be pleased to go to bed.

"It is scarcely worth while," I answered, "for morning will be here directly. But bring me a couple of rugs, Saunders, and I will lie down on this sofa, for I do not suppose that Dr Percivale will come now.

"I think not, sir," observed the man, as he prepared to do my bidding. Returning with the rugs a minute afterwards, he closed the door securely behind him, and advancing into the room, said, "I hope you think I did right, sir, in sending for Mrs Penryhn, but I scarcely knew what else to do."

"Quite right, Saunders ; you could not have done better. Was it your own idea, or by your poor mistress's request?"

"My mistress's maid was naturally very much alarmed, sir, when she was taken so ill, and so was my poor mistress herself ; and thinking a lady's presence was desirable, and not knowing of any lady more intimate here than Mrs Penryhn, I took the liberty of going in a cab, sir, and telling her the state of the case."

"I am infinitely obliged to you, Saunders," I said, "and I shall not forget it. But tell me how it all happened, from the beginning to the end."

At this request, Saunders first winced and coloured, and then looked as if he had been ordered to confess a crime of his own.

"Well ; why do you hesitate?"

"Hasn't Mrs Penryhn told you, sir?"

"No," I replied, "I scarcely exchanged a dozen words with Mrs Penryhn. When did your mistress first complain?"

"Well, soon after the ball, sir ; you see my mistress was very much shook by the accident."

"What accident ? what ball?" I demanded, breathlessly.

Saunders was visibly discomposed ; he fidgeted about and hesitated to reply until I had imperatively repeated the question.

"I believe, sir, it was a masked ball at the Opera House, at least so the lady's maid informed me. Have you seen the lady's maid, sir?"

"No, no ! go on—go on."

"Well, sir, it appears that on returning home the crowd of

vehicles was very great, and my mistress's cab got upset in the confusion, and she was hurt in consequence; at least so the story was told to me," added Saunders, with a touch of his usual caution.

I had turned sick and cold as he proceeded with his narrative, but I had not yet heard all, although I dreaded to put the next inquiry to him.

"But who accompanied Mrs Estcourt? Surely she did not go alone."

"Mrs and Miss Sherman called for her, sir, but they did not return with her. My mistress did not reach home till past five in the morning: she fainted as soon as she put her foot inside the door, and she was never well from that moment till the time I fetched Mrs Penryhn."

Here Saunders paused a moment, as though he knew that he had struck me another blow, and then added, very gently—

"Is there anything further, sir?"

"Nothing, Saunders, nothing! only leave me to myself,"

Ah, Julia! the mystery is a mystery no longer! Little need now to ask for explanations from Dr Percivale. I *know* why you are lying motionless upon that bed, struck down in your youth and beauty, with your blighted baby on your arm. Ada! dear angel of my life! teach me to worship truth as you have worshipped it!

CHAPTER XLI.

THE LONG-SOUGHT HAVEN GAINED AT LAST.

As soon as the funeral of my wife was over, I ordered everything that I valued in Brook Street to be sent down to Grasslands, sold off the furniture, and disposed of the remainder of the lease. I wished to sever every link that had bound me to the house; it was my desire never to see or to enter it again.

My sisters, now returned from Paris, were as ready with their condolences on my loss as they had been on my marriage ; but when Beatrice and Gertrude sent me invitations to stay at their houses, I refused them, though without comment. It was not a time for me to quarrel with the alteration in their behaviour, but I had not forgotten the reception I had last experienced at their hands, nor in what terms they had then spoken of that part of myself which I had just seen covered by the earth of Kensal Green.

But to a similar request from Emmeline I gratefully responded. It was real comfort to leave the empty, solitary house for my sister's wing, and to feel that I had but to rest there, and be spared the trouble of thinking for myself.

The only one of my servants whom I retained was Saunders, whose faithful attachment to me and to my father rendered it probable that we should never part. It was my intention, as soon as my affairs should be settled, to return to Paris, in the propriety of which plan every one seemed to acquiesce. Nobody, not even Ada, proposed that I should go to Grasslands ; so lonely a prospect, at all events for the present, seemed, by common consent, to be condemned.

Paris had always been a favourite place with me. I had private reasons for wishing to leave England for a while, and Marguerite was the attraction which prompted me to take up a temporary residence in the Queen of Cities.

And now, the small amount of baggage which I designed to take across the Channel having been put into travelling order by the careful Saunders, I was on the point of starting. But one thing detained me—a doubt ! I had not seen Ada since the evening that I returned from abroad. I had written to her several times, and taken her advice upon various matters, but I had not gone near her house, and my doubt was, whether I should call on her before I left England ; whether, under our peculiar circumstances, she would misconstrue my visit, or feel hurt by the omission.

I knew her delicacy to be great, but I could also trust her common sense ; and I feared she might take it as a bad compliment if I did not depend on the latter to prevent her entertaining any suspicions to which the former might give rise. Finally, I decided that as, in the character of a friend she had gone to the aid of my dying wife, so, in the character

of a friend, it behoved me in return to pay her the attention which any other lady, doing as she had done, would have received from me ; and, having determined that to visit her was a duty, I did not delay the performance of it.

She was at home ; properly and formally (and very unlike the manner of our last meeting in that house) I was ushered into her presence, and found her in the company of a young lady, whom she presented to me as her sister Georgina, but whom I should never have recognised as one of my romping friends of Freshwave.

"Should you not ?" exclaimed Ada, with surprise, "and she is considered so like me."

At this assertion I looked from one to the other.

Georgina Rivers was a very fine girl, but lacking Ada's grace ; her eyes were blue and bright, whilst Ada's were gray and soft ; and Georgie's hair was many shades nearer golden than that of her sister. She was a pretty creature, certainly, and promised to be prettier, but I had seen many faces which resembled hers, whereas, for me, Ada was like no one but herself.

"She is not a bit like you," I said, decidedly, as I finished my scrutiny, inwardly adding, "as never woman was nor will be."

"I am afraid not," replied the other, in a tone of unaffected self-depreciation. But as she spoke, she smiled.

"I start to-morrow," I said, opening the business upon which I had come, "and I am here to say good-bye to you."

"So soon ?" said Ada, and the smile faded from her face ; "well, you are wise. London is a dreary place in the winter."

"Where are you going ?" asked Georgie, who appeared quite competent to sustain her share of the conversation.

"To Paris, Miss Rivers ; at least for the present."

"What fun ! I wish we were going too. I suppose you'll always be out, amusing yourself, somewhere or other."

Ada glanced at her sister, as though to remind her of the circumstances under which I was leaving England, and Georgie, suddenly recalling them, blushed scarlet, and was mute.

"I don't think I shall," I replied, quietly, wishing to relieve her confusion, "for I hope to have one of my sisters to live with me and make my home pleasant ; besides which I am very busy just now, and have no time for running about."

"And when are you coming back again?" inquired Georgie, who had quickly recovered herself.

It was now my turn to be confused. This question, put to me before Ada, was difficult to answer.

"*Cela depends*," I said, playing with some article on the table. "I have not yet decided; perhaps in a few months, perhaps longer."

"And what then?" said inquisitive Georgie.

"What then, Miss Rivers?" I replied, with hesitation; "I am afraid we must leave '*what then*' for time to decide."

Ada rose and walked to the window.

"What a number of people there are in the gardens to-day," she remarked; "I think there must be something going on there."

"Let me see," exclaimed her sister, starting up with girlish curiosity, and edging herself into Ada's place. The latter had no alternative but to give way to her. She returned to the spot where I sat.

"May I continue to write to you?" I said, in a low voice.

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"You think I am right to go away for a while?"

"Quite so."

"And you will—Ada—you will"—

"Hush!" she said, softly.

I rose with a sigh, and prepared to take my leave.

"Will you give me no commission for Paris, Miss Rivers? No gloves or bon-bons? Don't forget how we used to romp together at Freshwave, or how happy it will make me at any time to be of use to you."

"Oh! you may send me plenty of both, Mr Estcourt, and forward the bill to Ada. She is my duenna now, and responsible for me in every way."

"But I will not be responsible for you and Mr Estcourt combined," said her sister, with a laugh, but very unlike the contagious laugh of old.

"Never mind her, Mr Estcourt," cried Georgie, "send them."

"With pleasure," I said, "and at the very first opportunity; what is your number, Miss Rivers, and which are your favourite bon-bons?"

"Sevens ; and caramels and nugotines," she replied, in the same spirit of banter.

"I will not forget them, or yourself," shaking hands with her ; "good-bye."

Then I turned to her sister.

"Good-bye, Mrs Penrhyn."

The words were the same, but the one meant nothing, and with the other my heart sprang to my eyes and trembled on my lips.

"God bless you !" she said, answering the look with which I had addressed her.

I lingered on the staircase and about the passage, in hopes that I might yet see her for a moment alone, but I think she was afraid to give me the opportunity.

But passing out of the hall-door, and looking upwards, I saw her sweet face framed in the window pane, and caught a last look from her serious, loving eyes.

The next day I was on my way to Paris.

On arriving there I went straight to my mother's house, and laid my wishes before her. I asked her to let me have my sister Marguerite to live with me during my residence in Paris ; represented that it would leave her more at liberty to pay a visit to Liliás, and be a real charity to myself. But Lady Mary would not agree to such a plan. Her own house was large, and she proposed instead that I should live with her, which, she affirmed, would come to the same thing, as I should be a companion for Marguerite whenever it suited herself to leave home. At first I demurred at accepting this offer, not wishing to put my mother to the expense of keeping me ; but after a while we came to an amicable agreement on the subject, and I took possession of a couple of rooms under her roof, and set steadily to work to complete the book which I had in hand.

I had never written under such advantages before ; the house was orderly and quiet to a degree ; my time was entirely at my own disposal ; and my spirits suffered too much from late events to make me desirous to spend it anywhere but in the seclusion of my own study.

Thus several months passed away ; I had despatched the gloves and bon-bons to Georgie Rivers, and had sent more than one letter to her sister, but I would not write too often for

fear she might think me importunate. I had told her all about my book, and she had expressed herself most interested in its successful completion ; but of what the future might contain for us we had not yet spoken to one another.

It is not to be supposed that this reticence on my part was attributable to anything but a desire to show every possible respect to the memory of my dead wife. No sooner was I convinced that the breath had really left her body than I also knew that hope gleamed once more in the future for Ada and myself.

But for the very reason that my first marriage had been so unpopular, and that the death of my wife was hailed by my friends as a piece of good fortune, I felt diffident at the idea of curtailing the interval which should elapse before I contracted a second.

Yet, though I was silent, my heart would sometimes speak through my written words, and if they were not rebuked, I was satisfied.

And still I plodded earnestly and steadily along the road trodden by my father before me.

But I had not forgotten that I wished to meet with Mrs Rivers. I had determined that I *should* meet with her before I asked Ada for the third time to be my wife. There should be no cloud, not even of the size of a man's hand, in the horizon of her life when she married me. It should be perfect, unutterable bliss—as far as I could make it so. To this end, I had not been settled in Paris many weeks before I commenced a strict search for Mrs Rivers, but neither by name nor description could I find her. Day after day I spent my time in wandering up and down the fashionable resorts in hopes of again meeting her, or in knocking at whole streets of houses where I thought I had some trivial chance of discovering her address.

But my trouble seemed in vain ; I could neither hear nor see anything of her ; and I was obliged to conclude that she had again left Paris.

But unwilling to resign my hope, I thought of advertising for her. I calculated that it was unlikely that her daughter or any of her immediate friends would see the Parisian papers, and therefore considered myself safe in inserting a paragraph in them to the effect that Mrs Rivers, formerly of —— Street,

London, was entreated to send her address to a certain *café*, under cover to E. G., who had a communication of importance to make to her concerning her nearest relative.

As soon as the advertisement had appeared, I took a daily walk to the *café* in question, to inquire if there was any letter addressed to E. G. waiting for me.

On the third day, to my great delight, I was informed that it had arrived, and as soon as it was delivered into my hands, sat down and broke the seal.

What was, then, my disappointment and chagrin, to find that the only inclosure was a blank sheet of paper.

Swearing aloud in my impatience, I rose impetuously from my seat, and with the crushed envelope in my hand, ran straight against—my Uncle Jabez.

As soon as I encountered the old gentleman, I perceived that he looked very thin and careworn, but my surprise at meeting him in Paris was so great that I had not much time to think of anything else.

"You here, Uncle Jabez!" I exclaimed. "I had no idea that you ever frequented this part of the world."

"What has disturbed you?" he inquired, in his old rough way, taking no notice of my remark.

"Nothing particular," I replied, vexed that he should have noticed my discomfiture. "Where are you staying?"

"At the Hôtel d'Angleterre. Are you walking that way?"

"I will do so with pleasure," and I followed him out of the *café*.

"Have you been ill, uncle?" I said, as we found ourselves once more on the *parvé*.

"Not ill; worried," was the answer.

"Nothing to do with home, I trust."

"Nothing to do with England," he replied, and at the time I did not notice his amendment.

We talked on ordinary topics until we reached the Hôtel d'Angleterre, and gained the privacy of his room. Then my Uncle Jabez, taking a seat near to me, drew a newspaper out of his pocket, and pointing to the column in which appeared my advertisement, electrified me with the inquiry—

"Do you know anything of this notice, Gerald?"

"What notice?" I exclaimed, with a view to obtaining time for consideration. "How should I, Uncle Jabez?"

"You have no knowledge of the author of the paragraph?"

"I will not say that," I replied.

"Nor of the letter addressed to E. G., for which you called to-day at the *café*?"

"I perceive that you have guessed my secret," I said, with annoyance; "but you must excuse me for saying that there the matter must drop. I have no intention of disclosing my motive for this advertisement."

"Not if I tell you I am the only person who can help you in the search?" he grimly answered.

"You!" I exclaimed, with unfeigned amazement; "why, Uncle Jabez, what can you know of the lady mentioned here, or of her probable address?"

"I happen to know it."

"Then tell it me, in heaven's name," I said, grasping his arm! "tell me, where Mrs Rivers is at this present moment, and whether I shall be able to obtain an interview with her."

"You will never see or speak to her again."

"Are you mocking me?"

"No; I never jest, especially on such matters."

"Then what is your reason for so strange an assertion?"

"Because she is dead: she died three months ago."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, "is it possible? Then at last I shall be able to clear myself. Death must surely cancel a promise such as mine."

"So the motive of this advertisement was to procure Mrs Rivers's consent to your mentioning her name to her daughter, eh?" said my uncle, regarding me fixedly from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "Had your visit to her in —— Street, last July twelvemonth, then, anything to do with the breaking off of your engagement with Mrs Penryhn?"

"Everything," I replied; "it was the sole cause; though how you come to know of it, puzzles me."

"I knew of it as soon as it had taken place," resumed my uncle, "though I must say that I attributed the events by which it was followed to the fact of your having discovered that the mother was still alive, rather than to any misunderstanding arising from the promise which was extracted from you. However, I have told you sufficient to prove that I know the principal circumstances of the case: if you think me worthy of your confidence, you had better tell me the rest."

"You were Mrs Rivers's friend," I said; "you evidently knew her well, and I shall be glad, Uncle Jabez, to have you for a confidant."

And with that I related the history of my meeting with Ada's mother; of the present I had taken from her, and the fatal consequences to which it led.

"It was, as you surmised, with the object of obtaining a release from the promise I had given to her that I inserted that paragraph in the papers, little thinking that she was not alive. And now, Uncle Jabez, you are sure that you have informed me correctly concerning her death; that there is no mistake about it. You see how much depends upon my having accurate intelligence."

"There is no mistake about it," he answered, shortly.

"You are *certain*," I urged; "you would attest the truth of it?"

"Boy," he exclaimed, suddenly turning to me, "who do you suppose answered your advertisement?"

"I cannot imagine; the more I think of it the more puzzled I become."

"I did; I saw the notice in the papers, and I sent the envelope addressed to E. G., and watched to see who should fetch it away. I must have had some knowledge of Mrs Rivers, to recognise that the paragraph was intended for her, and some interest in her to have taken the trouble to be curious about it. It's not my custom to meddle with other people's affairs."

"I know that well: what then, was your motive?"

"Simply to find out what the advertiser could have to communicate to one who, for the last twenty years, had been dead to the world. Well! I have found it out, and here is the result! When Mrs Rivers was dying, she begged me, if ever I had the opportunity, to tell you that she had never ceased to regret that your engagement with her daughter was broken off, and that if the knowledge of her existence had had anything to do with it that obstacle was removed. She died a few days afterwards, you may take my word for it; but if that won't satisfy you, I can tell you where to find her grave."

"But what connexion," I said, lost in wonder, "can you possibly have had with that unfortunate woman, who, as you say, died to society so many years ago? What link bound

you together, that she should have chosen you for her mouth piece after death ?”

“ She was my *wife*.”

“ *Your wife*, Uncle Jabez ! she was your *wife* !”

I could do no more than echo his words, as I stared at him with open eyes, thinking of his reputed bachelorhood, hoarded riches, and uncongenial nature, and attempted to realise that he had been the husband of the fragile, delicate woman, who, seen but once, had never been forgotten by myself.

“ Uncle Jabez,” touching his arm, “ surely you are joking : you do not intend me to believe you.”

“ It is the truth, Gerald,” and for the first time I saw something like feeling shine in the rugged face of the old man. “ She was my wife ; and I don’t care now who knows it. I loved her long before she married Rivers, and after that d—d brute Grieves deserted her, I would still have been proud if she would have openly taken my name ; but her spirits were too broken for that. She had no heart left to try and hold up her head in the world again ; but after a great deal of perseverance on my part she consented to marry me, so long as I kept her friends and mine in ignorance of the fact. She was my wife for fifteen years ; but she preferred to run the risk of being thought worse than better than she was, and so she always lived in darkness and seclusion, and so did I for the matter of that, without her. But she died, as I’ve told you, three months ago, in this very place ; and there’s an end of it. It’s the only time in my life that I’ve made a fool of myself, and I’m not likely to have another chance. Now, Gerald, you know the whole history, make no comment on it, and never let me hear you revive the subject. But you have my permission to tell it to Ada Penryhn : she’s too sensible not to keep it quiet ; and I don’t know what would please me more than to hear that you two had made it up again. But as you can’t start off for England to-night, perhaps you’ll stay and dine with me.”

I did stay and dine with the old man ; but above all my surprise at the strange narrative he had unfolded to me, and the sympathy I felt with himself, a new joy, like a peal of jubilant bells, kept up an incessant ringing in my heart, that must have rendered me a very uninteresting and inattentive companion. Yet, when I left him for the night, I ventured

to tell him that he was dear to me for my father's sake, and to express a hope that if I was happy enough to become Ada's husband, my wife and I would be as children to him.

"Pooh, pooh! I want no children," he answered, gruffly; but he looked pleased nevertheless, and said I had "poor Sampson's trick" of getting over a man. When I was once more alone, I sat down and made a great resolve—no less a one than that I would not write or speak to Ada of what I had heard that night, until the book that I had in progress was completed.

This sounds perhaps a simple thing to promise to myself, but I can record that I found it a very hard thing to do; yet, difficult or not, I accomplished it. I battled with my strong inclinations to fly to her and know my fate at once, and came off victorious. In another couple of months my novel had appeared in print and been reviewed. As these were the first reviews I obtained worthy of quotation, I must be excused from enlarging on them here. It is sufficient to say, that as I read them, and found that even critics can praise where true effort is discernible, I felt more than repaid for the hard work I had gone through.

I would not wait until I had received the hearty congratulations which I knew Ada would send me, but flushed with my triumph, ordered Saunders to be ready to accompany me to England at two hours' notice. I arrived in London late one afternoon in June, and only giving myself time to make a hasty toilet after my hurried journey, proceeded at once to Kensington.

Fortune favoured me: Ada was again at home. I did not wait to be announced this time, but flew up the little staircase into the dear familiar drawing-room.

She was by herself, writing letters, and as I made my appearance the pen dropped from her hand, and she gave vent to a slight exclamation.

"How you startled me!" she said, to account for the heightened colour and quick breathing with which she welcomed me, and which were twin signs of victory in my eyes. "I was just writing to congratulate you upon your success. I have seen all the reviews: you must be very much gratified by them."

I held her hand, and looked her full in the face, but an-

swered nothing. The hand made an effort to wrench itself away, but it was held too fast for that, and Ada's cheeks became crimson under the consciousness that she was a prisoner.

"You must be very much gratified," she repeated, hardly knowing what she said.

"No, I am not!" I exclaimed, heeding neither her efforts nor her confusion. "There is but one thing that can gratify me now, Ada; you remember the history of the ring—the history of the woman who gave it me, and caused all our misery."

"Yes," she said, in a low voice, conscious of what was coming.

"And that I told you I had attempted to find her again, but without success?"

"Yes, Gerald."

"I have found her, Ada. I am free to tell you who she was, and what the spell by which she claimed my interest."

I had chained Ada's interest now, and her large gray eyes were fixed, half fearfully, half curiously, upon my face. Then I remembered the disappointment in store for her, and corrected my assertion.

"I should not have said I had found her, Ada, for she died three months ago; but she left a message which released me from my promise."

"And she was——?"

The sweet lips I longed to claim were parted now in trembling expectation.

"She was—remember she is *dead*, dear Ada—she was *your mother*."

The little hand dropped passively from mine, and I threw my arm round the drooping figure, which seemed to sway from me.

"My *mother*, Gerald, and she is *dead*? My poor, outcast mother, gone and at peace—once more at peace, and after all that wretchedness; oh, I am so thankful! But was it for *this*—for *this*—because you did not despise my mother like the rest of the world, that I sent you from me. Oh, Gerald, Gerald!" and disengaging herself from me as she spoke, Ada sank upon the sofa and buried her tearful face amongst its cushions.

"Ada, my darling, my own!" I exclaimed, throwing myself beside her, "I have waited till I could thoroughly clear myself before I ventured to ask you for the third time if you will be my wife. Tell me, dearest," as I pulled her hands from before her face and forced an answer from her eyes—"is there to be luck in odd numbers for such a prodigal as I am? Will you give me your love once more, and better than your love—your *trust*?"

Every one can guess for himself what Ada told me; she had loved me too well, notwithstanding my unworthiness, not to love me long; and before another half hour had elapsed she had been informed of all that it was necessary for her to know concerning her late mother; and I sat on the sofa once more with my Betrothed.

We were married as soon as the year of my mourning had expired, and have lived at Grasslands ever since. We generally go up to town for the season, but we have no permanent residence there, for I miss the exercise which I get in the country; and as I am growing what Ada calls "alarmingly" stout, exercise is a consideration with me.

Uncle Jabez lives with us, so does Marguerite—and the Talbots are settled not far off.

It required an immense deal of persuasion on both our parts to induce my uncle to give up his little cottage at Richmond, but we succeeded at last, and I believe the old man is really happy.

Ada has two sons; and I fear they are not to make the sum total of our family.

When we have a daughter I say that our happiness will be complete; but should my wish be realised, I shall doubtless find something else to set my heart upon. I suppose this world would be a dull place if we were forbidden to have our little grievances.

I continue writing, and I hope to do so till I die. I have given up the expectation of acquiring more than a tithe of my father's popularity; but I trust that I shall yet do something sufficiently well to make the public forget that his name was ever endangered by my carelessness.

What more can I say? *The family* is in good health, and as fond of its prospective "head" as ever; a species of fond-

ness which, without jesting, I earnestly hope may not be transmitted to the fourth generation.

“What more *can* I say? Tell me, Ada!” leaning over my chair and disturbing me at my occupation; “shall I tell the world how dear you are to me; how your love has lightened every trouble on my way, and your wisdom straightened each perplexity; how your sweet face?——”

“Hush, Gerald. Don’t be so foolish. Tell it about Jack and Georgie.”

“By Jove! so I will.” I had nearly forgotten the last piece of news which concerns us.

Miss Rivers was married, only the week before last, to the Honourable Jack Lascelles.

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